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# The Human One? A Controversial CEB Translation Choice

**Abstract:** The choice of the editors of the Common English Bible (CEB) to translate Greek, Aramaic and English phrases as either "The Human One" or "the human being" has been controversial. However, it renders the "literal" meaning of a stock idiom that was in use both in the Aramaic of Jesus' day and in the Hebrew and Aramaic language in the OT. For those who are not taught the literal meaning of the idiom, the traditional literalistic word-for-word translation of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as "the Son of Man" is either meaningless or misleading both in terms of Christology and for following the narrative of the Gospels. An accurate translation of the sense of the Aramaic and Hebrew idiom was virtually a necessary choice for semantic accuracy, and reflects the CEB's purpose and translation theory. It is also a missional choice to render the Word of God in a way that is understood in the target audience's language. However, the majority of the public that purchases Bibles has religious and theological commitments and tends to expect or even demand specific theological vocabulary and technical terms that are part of a specialized religious register, even though it is misunderstood. Therefore, the CEB engages in "norm-breaking" by attempting to choose vocabulary from registers that are currently in use in the English language in comparable contexts as those that are represented in the source text.

**Keywords:** Bible translation; Common English Bible; the Human One; the Son of Man; formal equivalence; dynamic equivalence; functional equivalence; Skopos theory

## Introduction

The English translation of the idiom ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the New Testament is often a problem for Bible translators who do not prescribe to a strict formal equivalence theory of translation. There is also a related translation problem for rendering the singular and plural of כְּבַר־אֱנָשׁ in the Old Testament, and the Aramaic *bar enash*, which is in Daniel and is generally acknowledged as the language that Jesus actually used in most registers.[1] The choice of the editors of the Common English Bible (CEB) to translate Greek, Aramaic and English phrases as either 'The Human One' or 'the human being' has been a point of controversy.[2] This paper will talk about the semantics of the idiom in the NT and its relationship to the corresponding idioms in Hebrew and Aramic in the OT. It will then evaluate the semantics of the English phrases 'The Human

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[1] The majority of scholarship has assumed that Jesus spoke Aramaic, but given the linguistic composition of Palestine as a multi-lingual society, it is possible or probable that Jesus engaged in code-switching in which there was a correspondence between register and language selection. See Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus*. Register is described in Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context and Text*, 29, as 'a variety of language, corresponding to a variety of situation.' See also Peterson, "Multilingualism, Multilectalism and Register Variation," for a discussion of the interaction between multilingualism and register variation.

[2] Most of the discussion and criticism has occurred online on discussion lists and blogs.

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One' and 'the human being' in contrast with the formal equivalent phrase 'The Son of Man.' Finally it will evaluate this translation choice in both in the context of the purpose of the translation and evaluate it in the light of modern translation theory.[3]

# Word Study in the Source Text

## The Phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the Greek New Testament

In the Gospels, this phrase is Jesus' favourite way of referring to himself (only in John 12:34 is this term used by somebody else citing him). It is used in the NT 86 times. It is used 69 times in the Synoptics, and twelve times in John. However, it is not used in the early church confessions, and it is used only four times in the rest of the NT. Three of the four times occur in narratives and the fourth is a citation of the OT. In Acts 7:56, Stephen refers to a vision of Jesus as he died, which would be understood in the context of the Synoptic tradition. Two are in Revelation where visions of Jesus described as ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου allude to Daniel 7:13 (1:13, 14:14).[4] The fourth occurence is in the citation of Ps. 8:4–6 in Heb. 2:6–8.[5] These patterns suggest a high collocation of the idiom with genre (narrative) in its use by the early church.

Many if not all of Jesus' self-references were likely spoken in Aramaic. In Aramaic, the term is an idiom meaning "human being."[6] Bock claims that in certain texts, "There is no need to invoke Daniel 7 in order to make sense of the usage in these passages. Nor should such a background be assumed. Indeed, in such idiomatic uses Jesus simply presents himself as a human with certain rights and authority."[7] In all three synoptic gospels, Jesus constrains the idiom with layers of references to his suffering, but he also gives the idiom a special kind of authority, with messianic and apocalyptic associations.[8] However, he controls the flow of information that defines the idiom.

According to the gospel accounts, Jesus' use of the idiom through the majority of his ministry was not transparent to his listeners. They realized that he was giving it significance (this would be clear from the contexts and the grammatical markedness resulting from the consistent addition of two articles), but they could not figure out for sure what he meant when he applied the idiom to himself. John describes the confusion of the crowds after his triumphal entry and shortly before the upper room discourse. The crowd says, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the *son of man* must be lifted up? Who is this *son of man*?" (John 12:34 NRSV). His language was still ambivalent enough to keep the crowds confused. Similarly, in the Synoptic tradition, Jesus asks his disciples "Who do people say that *the son of man* is?" and the disciples associate the term with various prophets (John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah), which would be consistent with the association of the term both generally to refer to a "human being" and specifically to refer to a prophet as in Ezekiel (Matt. 16:13–14).[9] But when he asked, "Who do *you* say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15–16). This suggests that Jesus was exploiting the meaning of the idiom in the linguistic system as well as the biblical tradition and giving the idiom new meaning when applied to himself. Also in the Synoptics, he first associates the idiom with Daniel

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**3** The content of this paper was originally presented 17 June 2016 at the McMaster Divinity College Bingham Colloquium on Linguistics and the Bible: Retrospect and Prospects.

**4** Daniel 2:4–7:28 is written in Aramaic. The Aramaic phrase *bar enash* means 'human being' and is not a title.

**5** Paul uses the plural of the idiom once in Eph. 3:5: "this mystery was not made known to humankind" (NRS).

**6** See Casey, *The Solution to the 'Son of Man,'* 80, 67 and Casey, "The Son of Man Problem," 11–12. However, Casey's conclusion that Jesus "considered himself less unique than Christian scholarship on the whole supposes" does not follow in the way he is depicted by the gospel writers, because the role it plays in the Synoptic strategy that culminates in him emphasizing his unique role at the trial before the Sanhedrin.

**7** Bock, "Son of Man," 895. See also the direct association between "*the son of man*" and "humans" (ἀνθρώποις) in Matt 9:6, 8.

**8** See Porter's three categories in which he organizes the information that occurs with the Son of Man sayings in the Synoptics (Porter, *Sacred Tradition*, 58–62).

**9** It is interesting to note that the Synoptic parallels in Mark 8:27–29 and Luke 9:18–20, Jesus asks "Who people [the crowds] say I am," rather than using the idiom 'the son of man.'

7 privately with the disciples in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:1–51//Mark 13:1–37//Luke. 21:5–36), which is after the Truimphal Entry.

It was in his trial before the Sanhedrin that Jesus for the first time publically associated the idiom with Daniel 7.[10] In Matt. 26:63–64 (Mark 14:62//Luke 22:69), "the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see *the son of man* seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (NRSV). That was the point at which they charged him with blasphemy—when he finally made a clear connection of the idiom with a passage that that would point to a possibly angelic or divine association. I agree with Porter that Jesus drew from the sacred tradition in Daniel 7 and the 2nd Temple writings in *1 Enoch* in the associations he made with the idiom.[11] However, the idiom is clearly utilized in discourse staging in all four of the Gospels. The idiom was not recognizable to the crowd or the authorities as a messianic title because of its function as a common idiom in both Aramaic and the language of the OT.[12] If the leaders had recognized it as a messianic title that must be associated with Daniel 7, they would have killed him sooner, so it is part of the "Messianic Secret" pattern.[13] To understand the flow of the story, we need to translate it in such a way that it semantically reflects the idiom and allows the reader to follow Jesus as he progressively constrains it. The translation of the term in the narratives must be distinguished from what Jesus actually meant when he used the term or its significance in constructing a biblical theology.

The CEB translation of the idiom as 'the human being' in the citation of Ps. 8:4 in Heb. 2:6 maintains the meaning of the idiom in the context of the Psalm, in which the referent is understood to be humans who are the objects of God's regard and who have a role in fulfilling the creation mandate.[14] It has been argued that the idiom was a technical term and a messianic title in the early church, so it should be understood as messianic in this citation. However, there are two objections to this argument. First, for a Jewish Christian audience (or Jews within a mixed group), the idiom, particularly in a citation of the OT, would have the same ambiguity as it had for Jesus' audience in the Gospels.[15] Second, the rhetoric and the line of argument in the passage require it to be understood as 'the human being.' The point of the citation in 2:6–8a is that the human destiny is to be crowned and rule everything. The author then states in 2:8b–9 that we do not see humanity fulfilling the human destiny, but we do see that Jesus has fulfilled the human destiny *because* of his identification with humanity in his incarnation (lower than the angels) and death. That is to say, much

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**10** It is possible that Jesus was speaking Greek during the trial. According to Hughson Ong, code-switching occurs in multi-linguistic cultures in predictable patterns, and trials would be conducted in the *lingua franca* language which would be Greek (Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus*, 282, 247–48, 297–98). Consider then Casey's suggestion that when the generic Aramaic idiom is in Greek, it sounds like a title to a reader who is not acquainted with Aramaic, and therefore "This shift of meaning has taken place with the transmission of the saying from Aramaic to Greek. The Aramaic idiom has been lost" (Casey, "The Son of Man Problem," 150). However, if Ong is correct, then Jesus would have translated the idiom to Greek in certain contexts, and the evidence would indicate that he added the articles, since they occur in every instance of the idiom in the Gospels but one.

**11** Porter, *Sacred Tradition*, 76–77.

**12** Contra Casey, who argues that Jesus meant the idiom to be generic and his usage reflected the stock idiom, but to do so he only accepts twelve sayings as authentic and attributes the rest to the early church tradition (Casey, "The Son of Man Problem," 152).

**13** This is an allusion to the Marcan motif in which Jesus commanded his followers to be silent about his identity and mission. The Gospels indicate that explicit messianic (or apocalyptic) connections with the idiom resulted in a charge of blasphemy and directly led to his death. Wrede published his classic work *The Messianic Secret*, in 1901. His thesis was that Jesus' suppression of demonic confessions of Christ's identity was not historical, but rather an addition by the Mark. The role the idiom plays in the narratives suggests that it was a survival strategy in a politically dangerous environment.

**14** A number of translations make the same choice. Though the NRS translates the other occurrences of the idiom in the NT as 'the Son of Man,' in the OT, the Hebrew idiom is translated as 'mortal,' and here "mortal" is also used. See also Heb. 2:6 in the TNIV and the NLT, which render the idiom "mere mortals." The NJB renders the idiom 'child of Adam.' The CEB did not prefer 'mortal' because it accentuates the human characteristic of death, which is not reflected in the Hebrew or Aramaic idiom, and would not transfer well to Jesus' use of the idiom, though Jesus' use of the idiom is clearly connected with the OT and pseudipigrapha.

**15** If Hebrews was written to a Jewish Christian audience, the stock idiom could still be in use by the community or at least the recipients could have had a background in Aramaic. Furthermore, since it is a citation of the OT, the original meaning and the OT idiom would have been influential. It is notable that Paul never used this as a Christological title in his epistles, which may suggest that he felt that the idiom would be misunderstood by a Gentile audience.

like the patterns in the gospels, the Hebrews author cleverly takes the stock idiom and then gives it an explicit messianic meaning— but the rhetoric is missed if we translate it as a messianic title in 2:6, and the introduction of the theme of his identification with humanity is lost.[16] In the following passage in 2:10–18, the author shows that Jesus' identification with humanity qualified him to be a merciful and faithful high priest. So translating the idiom as the titular 'Son of Man' in Heb. 2:6 actually detracts from the author's elegant Christological argument and the use of rhetoric where he introduces the name and person of Jesus in contrast with the human condition.

## The OT as a Source

In discussing the theory of translation, Pym asks why we limit ourselves as translators to one source in our theory? "Surely each source can be traced back to a number of previous sources?"[17] Anyone acquainted with any discussion of this phrase knows that the answer to this must be "yes", and our understanding and discussion of the phrase has been completely dominated by its use in the OT and the pseudipgrapha. This invokes theories of intertextuality and the broad discussion of the use of the OT in the NT. In the OT, בֶּן־אָדָם occurs 107 times in the singular (but it also occurs in the plural) as an idiom to designate a human being, particularly in the poetry books and Ezekiel. It is used to contrast humanity with God in Num. 23:19. Ps. 8:4 speaks of the status of humanity and the creation mandate in contrast with God and the angels, while a parallel passage in Ps 144:3 speaks of the transitory nature of humanity.

The idiom occurs 93 times in Ezekiel, which is the most marked use of the idiom in a single text in the OT; it is God's form of direct address to the prophet, emphasizing his humanity. Caragounis suggests that his role is one of representative, intercessor, and substitute for the people, so the idiom identifies him and his role with them.[18] This is an important distinction because some assume that the reference to humanity emphasizes weakness and a low status. That is certainly not the case in Ps 8:4, nor in the contrast between humans and animals, so it should not be assumed in the case of Ezekiel.

Daniel's vision in Daniel 7:13 is that of a human-like figure in a supernatural context: "one like a *son of man* coming with the clouds of heaven" who is given glory, authority and power and is worshipped. However, the idiom means human-like regardless of the status of the referent—and in this passage the idiom is in Aramaic, in which the stock idiom is well-established. In Daniel 8:17, Daniel is directly addressed by God with the idiom. The evidence from the OT suggests that the idiom in Hebrew is also a stock idiom. It was translated as υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου in the LXX or with the vocative in Ezekiel and Daniel 8:17, so that the occurrence of the idiom in Greek would not have been strange to most Jews. The idiom also occurs in 1 Enoch and refers to a 'son of man' who is described in a similar way as the one in Daniel, but it is significantly expanded to a preexistent chosen messiah who judges and has the face of an angel (eg. 46:1–2; 48:2; 49:2; 48:10; 46:4–5). Similarly, the semantic contribution of 'son of man' indicates that this individual resembles a human, which is consistent with the use of the idiom.[19]

In the case of the application of the idiom and its OT associations to Jesus, I suggest that making the semantic information of his humanity clear through translation is theologically important, and even crucial. The figures in Daniel and *1 Enoch* were *humanlike*. However, when Jesus alluded to the phrase in its apocalyptic contexts, he significantly omitted the qualifier that indicated he was "like" a human, from which one infers that the figures in Daniel and *1 Enoch* are not human. Jesus edited the phrase in a way that indicated he was fully human—which is what the idiom means.

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**16** See also Blomberg, "But We See Jesus."

**17** Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, 2.

**18** Caragounis, *Son of Man*, 60

**19** The dating of the Similitudes of Enoch (chs. 37–71) has been debated for the past two hundred years. While the majority will date the Similitudes at the "turn of the era," so that Christian tradition was able to utilize it as a source, others suggest that the Christian tradition is the source for the Similitudes. See Ehro, "Historical-Allusional Dating."

## Larger Linguistic Context: The Idiom of υἱὸς τοῦ [x]

The construction υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου is part of an even more common idiom where "son of" can occur with a variety of nouns to indicate that a person is characterized by a quality associated with the noun: "one who has the character of [x]." It is clearly a metaphorical extension of a genetic relationship such as υἱοὶ Ισραηλ. The extension to non-genetic relationships include οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ and οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν προφητῶν, which are quite common. Mark 3:17 is an interesting case, where Jesus calls James the son of Zebedee and his brother John Boanerges, which John translates from Aramaic as υἱοὶ βροντῆς (the Sons of Thunder). However, he expects the reader to understand the idiom. The idiom occurs in Hebrew, Aramaic and in the Greek of the LXX and the NT.[20]

## The Question of Gender

Gender issues have been a concern in the discussion because the masculine singular "son" is omitted and the masculine singular "man" is changed to the gender inclusive term "human," so that the choice appears to support an ideological agenda. One relevant question is whether the male gender or the quality of masculinity is an uncancellable quality of the υἱός idiom in either the plural or the singular? That is, would an accurate translation of the semantics of the idiom require a masculine reference or references in the target language?

The masculine plural in the Greek, as in Hebrew, Latin and many modern languages, must be used to refer to groups that include males and females. So the rule of thumb would be that idioms in the Greek NT that occur with the plural of υἱός would include women unless the context indicated otherwise. The most common example in the Greek NT would be υἱοὶ θεοῦ (Matt. 5:9), rendered "children of God" by the NRSV which occurs first in the canon in the beatitudes in Matt. 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9). More importantly, Rom. 8:14 states: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (Rom. 8:14 NRSV). Women can make peace and can be led by the Spirit of God. See also Luke 20:34: οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου "the sons of this age" rendered as "those who belong to this age" (NRSV), which would include women.

Is the idiom gender specific when it occurs in the singular form? A good test case would be the phrase in Luke 10:6: ἐὰν ἐκεῖ ᾖ υἱὸς εἰρήνης in the context of the pericope where Jesus sends out the seventy-two: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a *son of peace* is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:5-6 ESV).[21] This demonstrates the function of the masculine singular as the default or unmarked gender that is less specific by definition and can be used in a generic way for both genders—anyone who is characterized by peace will have the messenger's peace rest on them. Therefore, the masculine should not be considered an essential part or an uncancellable quality of the semantics of the υἱός idioms. Since the referent of the idiom is male in the case of Jesus, the gender is constrained and semantically unambivalent, so that maintaining the masculine gender over-emphasizes or overloads the reference to gender in a way that is inconsistent with the semantics of the source text.

On the other hand, an insistence on using the word "man" to translate ἄνθρωπος, which is semantically gender inclusive, is beginning to assume the aspect of an ideologically-driven agenda, particularly in light of

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**20** Paul rarely uses the singular idiom. He refers to Jesus as the Son of God only 4 times (Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:13). He also uses the singular idiom with destruction (2 Thess. 2:3), and in Gal. 4:30, Paul cites Gen. 21:10: "son of the bondwomen," and adds "son of the free woman," but then uses τέκνα to apply the passage to the readers. Paul collocates the plural of υἱός with a genitive for God (4 times: Rom. 8:14, 19; 9:26; Gal 3:26), Israel (3 times: Rom. 9:27; 2 Cor. 3:7, 13), disobedience (3 times: Eph. 2:2; 5:6; Col. 3:6), Abraham (1 time: Gal. 3:7), light (1 time: Eph. 5:5) and day (1 time: Eph. 5:5). However, he clearly prefers to use the neuter τέκνα with the genitive for the same concepts when referring to the readers.

**21** Note the translation in the TNIV for 10:6: If the head of the house loves peace (Luke 10:6 TNIV), which is an addition of information in contrast with the NIV: "someone who promotes peace." This is an example of the practice of "explication" in which additional information is added to the text. The addition in the TNIV is not necessarily gender exclusive, since a woman could be the head of a house (though the default understanding of the head of the house would be male), but it is questionable whether the gospel's offer of peace would be withdrawn from all family members if the head of the house did not qualify.

the current discussion on gender and translation. It is true that sometimes ἄνθρωπος can best be translated into natural English idiom as "man" when it has a masculine referent as is the practice in the CEB: "A man [ἄνθρωπος] was there whose right hand was withered" (Luke 6:6 CEB). However, if the quality of humanity is in view, it should be rendered as "human" unless it is unnatural in English: "There is one God and one mediator between God and humanity [ἀνθρώπων], the human [ἄνθρωπος] Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5 CEB).[22] The CEB brings out the inclusive language of the semantics of the Greek text in this theologically crucial passage so that the target audience may understand its universal application in a way that is comparable to the source audience.[23]

## Meaning and Etymology of the Target Idiom

### The Etymology of "Human"

All through the discussion above, it was stated that related idioms in Hebrew and Aramaic that are translated as υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου all semantically refer to a human. The English word "human" has an extremely close correspondence to the Hebrew word אָדָם (*adam*) in its etymology.[24] While Barr argued that we should not base the meaning of a word on its etymology, in this case it is illuminating for those interested in equivalence and because the etymology is apparent in the composition of the word.[25] It was first used in the 15th century, and comes from Old French *humain* or Latin *humanus* which mean "of man" or "belonging to a man." Etymologists directly compare it with the Hebrew *adam* "man," who comes from *adamah* "ground." It therefore communicates the semantic information of the idiom fairly well, and actually shares some corresponding associations. However, ἄνθρωπος alone can be translated as "human." The use of extra words mark the phrase, including two articles that occur in all but one of Jesus' citations. Therefore, instead of replacing four words in the Gospel with two words ('the Human'), 'the Human One' was preferred. However, it may be argued that 'the Human Being' renders the idiom in more natural English.[26] Some have expressed concern that the intertextual links with Daniel 7 and *1 Enoch* will not be clear with this gloss. However, the idiom in Daniel 7 is translated the same way in the CEB. Those who are interested in the textual ties with *1 Enoch* will generally learn of them and access them through study notes, teaching or other sources. A valid concern is that the symmetrical tie between the Son of God and the Son of Man is lost, which elegantly reflect the divinity and humanity of Jesus. That is a loss, but observation in the church and the classroom suggests that most of the readers of the English Bible do not make that connection.

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**22** Contrast the CEB rendering with that of the ESV: For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5 ESV). Grudem and Poythress insist that passages such as this would not be misunderstood (Poythress and Grudem, *Bible Controversy*. 223–32). However, the ESV renders both ἀνήρ and ἄνθρωπος as "man." They helped compose and follow the Colorado Springs Guidelines that argue that "man" is a precise translation of ἀνήρ (Ibid.,308; C.f. 321–33). Counter arguments aside, this practice fails to acknowledge that the author's choice of ἄνθρωπος instead of ἀνήρ has meaning and theological significance. In addition, the target audience must use implicature to determine whether "man" is precise or generic in this theologically crucial passage. It is far more accurate (and equivalent) to use the resources in the English language to make the distinction, particularly since there is a distinction in Greek. Furthermore, I suggest a field test which the reader could use to determine whether this use of "man" is confusing or ambiguous: ask both adults and children to interpret the gender references and infer the context in the following phrase: "There is one mediator between the management and the men: the man John Smith." I predict that the interpretations would at least entertain a gender exclusive interpretation, and I can promise that this language would not be allowed in a legal document or contract if it were meant to apply to women. If that is the case, why would we allow it in a passage from which readers will construct their theology?

**23** Note that according to LSJ, the CEB translation could be considered formally equivalent, since the meaning of the plural of ἄνθρωπος includes "humanity." However, technically, the change from a plural to a singular is an implication that the lexicographers have already made for the translators.

**24** See the etymology of "Human (adj.)."

**25** See Barr's influential work, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, 107–58.

**26** The addition of the articles in ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the gospel occurrences made it more emphatic, but it did not particularize the idiom as it would in English.

### The Meaning of 'the Son of Man' in English

The traditional way of translating ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as 'son of man' is what is known in translation theory as a "false friend" which involves "lexical, phraseaological and syntactic forms that look similar but have different functions in different languages."[27] It not only fails to communicate the semantics of the idiom but it may communicate undesirable information. Three areas of concern include the specific criticisms of the CEB's translation choice, interpretations of the idiom by lay people in the church and predictions of how a reader without a church background might read the phrase.

A large number of criticisms of the CEB insist that 'the son of man' is a reference to the divinity of Christ. This group understands it as a Christological title and it is assumed that Christology is concerned with Jesus' divinity. Last week in a phone call I was told that a man stood up in church and called the CEB Satanic because it called Christ 'the Human One.' This reflects an unfortunate gnostic tendency in the evangelical community in which the divinity of Christ significantly overshadows his humanity, and it would seem to require attention and correction. However, the context of this criticism was a debate on the leadership of women in the church, so that it was linked to gender issues and "muting the masculinity of Christ."

In the classroom and the church, when I have asked lay people who read the Bible or even students going into ministry what 'the son of man' means, they often cannot come up with a coherent answer at all other than it is a title. Some may suggest that it is messianic, but they have no idea why. It has some traction in the culture as an exclusively apocalyptic reference because it has appeared in popular apocalyptic literature, so that it may carry undesirable intertextual ties to other popular contexts.[28]

An even more serious concern is what 'the Son of Man' might mean to someone who has neither a background in the Bible nor any relationship with the church. To a naïve reader, Jesus can be claiming over and over again that he is the son of a man. One can easily ignore the lack of an indefinite article as strange feature of a foreign text. Without a background a reference to Jesus as 'the Son of Man' appears to contradict the virgin birth. This is a very real concern given the purpose and target audience of the CEB.

'The son of man' is a false friend in translation in English and probably in any modern language because it is semantically empty if the reader does not share the background information with the translator or the source text. It is particularly deceptive because the meaning lies in the whole phrase (idiom) and its intertextual ties, but the individual words are easily recognizable and will have very high recognition in a readability test, but the semantic whole is significantly different from the sum of its semantic parts.

## The Purpose and Guidelines of the CEB

The Common English Bible was committed to principles that served a particular target audience, and which were sensitive to changes in the cultural context which effect language. These changes include a cultural preference for plain language, an emerging worship reformation in text and music, and the equal power of image and text.[29] While the publisher (Abingdon) determined the CEB's purpose, it was first suggested in a consultation committee.

### Target Audience

There was a double goal for the translation. It was to be missional in that it should be understandable to people with no church background with a maximum seventh grade reading level. Within those parameters, it was to be suitable to use in congregational worship, in that it was translated so that it could easily be read out loud.

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**27** Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, 14.
**28** Google searches can be a great help to translators both in testing one's notion about contemporary "natural English" and in discovering associations. A Google image search on "the Son of Man" yields disturbing imagery. A number of traditional biblical terms have been "hijacked" in art, literature and for commercial purposes.
**29** "Our New Bible Style Guide," 2.

## Readability

The translators of the CEB were encouraged to insure readability in a number of ways. They were directed to use shorter sentences, use default English word order and fewer passive verbs. They were encouraged to measure the readability of the text as they worked.[30] Each translator had a consulting reader whose purpose was to insure accuracy and readability. The editors used contractions for appropriate genres such as letters. In practice, the editors aimed at a fifth grade reading level if possible. Each book had two translators, then it was read out loud by a small group of lay people who gave their observations on the readability, then it was edited.

## Explicit Guidelines

The following guidelines summarize the purposes of the CEB:[31]
– Clear (plain) English vocabulary
– Seventh grade reading level
– Accurate English grammar
– Natural English syntax
– Evocative, imagistic language (in contrast to precise, wooden and systematic rhetoric)
– Effective in oral recitation in a worship or educational setting

## A Purpose-Driven Choice

If the translators were going to be true to the purpose of the CEB, it would have to impact the translations of idioms: specifically, we were not able to retain the traditional "literalistic" word for word rendering of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as 'the Son of Man.' Even though each individual word passes a readability test at the primary level, the phrase 'the Son of Man' is incomprehensible for a seventh grade reading level. The target audience's use of implicature will invariably lead the reader to the wrong interpretation. 'The Son of Man' is neither clear English nor natural syntax. While the CEB is written to appeal to the ear and to be used in oral worship in a church setting, the editors intentionally avoided traditional language that only occurs in a church register, or what we like to call "biblish." Similar considerations also led to the use of contractions in narrative dialogue and letters and any other non-formal genres.[32]

I remember that when I participated in an online Bible Translation group, we were asked to list the resources that we found the most helpful. I was the only one to list a Thesaurus. I was sensitized to how the King James vocabulary was deeply ingrained in most English translations, so that many of us assume an equivalent correspondence between the languages of the source text and archaic, theological or uncommon terminology. I tried to approach the vocabulary selection as a translator would in translating to a language or dialect in the emerging world—you translate into the language in use. I was constantly asking myself, "How do we really say that?" I would Google phrases to see which syntax or wording that expressed the Greek semantic context was most common in current English. Given the guidelines and missional purpose of the CEB, the traditional and formal equivalent translation of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου was neither advisable nor necessary.

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**30** The translators were encouraged to use the readability tool in Microsoft Word, but the publisher measured readability with the Dale-Chall method, which measures both vocabulary and syntax (particularly sentence length).
**31** These guidelines are an accurate overview of the considerations that were first articulated in 2007 (cf. "Our New Bible Style Guide") and reflected in the "Style Guide for Translators, Editors and Proofreaders."
**32** A contractions chart was distributed to the translators, editors and proofreaders that was adapted from material provided to teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL).

# Evaluation of the CEB According to Translation Theory

The remaining question to answer is how the CEB would be evaluated in the light of modern translation theories. The evaluation will include the detection of the translation theories that were practiced by the CEB in the light of recent theories, and at least a partial discussion about its success in terms of theory. The theories include Formal Equivalence, Dynamic Equivalence, the Skopos Theory of translation, and the Descriptive Approach to translation.

According to Pym, formal equivalence is close to what "many translators, clients and translation users believe about translation."[33] Formal equivalence assumes that there is "equal value" between what is said in a source-text and what is said in a target text, which may be applied to any linguistic level, so that it is assumed that the target text should as close as possible to the source text on every level. Formal equivalent translators strive for a straightforward word for word correspondence and attempt to mimic the form of the source language in such a way that the text could be back-translated. The CEB translators were not encouraged to mimic the form of the source language as a great effort was made to shorten sentences for readability. As far as vocabulary choice, few critics would recognize how close the CEB actually comes to Formal Equivalence on a comparative scale because many assume that only the archaic and theological words in their favourite translation are the words that have an equal value to the words in the source text.[34] While probably none of the CEB editors believe that words can be translated from one language to another with equal value,[35] in practice, much of the efforts in translation attempted to stay as close to the source text as possible. However, the vocabulary choice in the target language was supposed to be freshly drawn from contemporary English in use, rather than resources and translation helps that reinforce KJV vocabulary such as Metzger's *Lexical Aids* or Kubo's *Reader's Greek-English Lexicon*, which are used by Greek students in translation exercises. Contemporary English words have more semantic correspondence to the Greek terms for the target audience than 17th century words have.

The translation approach of the CEB is indebted to Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence and functional equivalence, which recognizes that there are different forms of equivalence and nuances the concept of "natural equivalence." While formal equivalence mimics the form of the source language, and dynamic equivalence activates the same or similar cultural function: "Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message."[36] However, the concept of "dynamic" has come to be misunderstood and associated with some extremes such as translating John 1:29 as "the Lamb of God" as "the Pig of God" or "the seal of God" when the target group has no knowledge of sheep—which are examples of provocative types of choices that the CEB wanted to avoid. Therefore, the term "functional equivalence," which was also suggested by Nida, was adopted to attempt to limit contextualization and to communicate that limitation, or what some have described as a balance between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. The choice of 'the Human One' or 'the human being' as a translation of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is a good example of maintaining that balance.

A more recent translation theory, developed primarily by German theorists, claims that the idea of equivalence is illusionary in the practice of translation in general, as shown in the translation process involved in producing game shows in different languages and cultures. According to Skopos theory, every translation serves a purpose (or the Skopos).[37] A text may be translated different ways to accomplish

**33** Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, 6.
**34** The publishers state that its approach is located between Formal and Dynamic Equivalence.
**35** As Louw and Nida assert in the introduction of their lexicon on semantic domains that was primarily designed for translators, "The most serious mistake which people make in dealing with the meanings of Greek terms is to presume some kind of one-to-one correspondence in meaning." Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, xiv. Furthermore, there is a complementary principle on synonyms in the same language: "The first principle of semantic analysis of lexical items is that there are 'no synonyms,' in the sense that no two lexical items ever have completely the same meanings in all of the contexts in which they might occur," (xvi).
**36** Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 12.
**37** Hans Vermeer is the primary founder of Skopos theory. For a description, see Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*.

different purposes and functions.[38] The closer the purpose of the target text is to the source text, the closer the equivalence would be. The publisher or the client determines the goals, so that the translator needs information about the purpose of the translation, which determines the principles of translation. As described above, the CEB indeed had specific purposes that were determined by the publisher. It may be argued, and has been argued, that the purposes and function of the translators of the CEB would not be explicitly the same as the function and purpose of the original authors of the biblical texts. However, that is true for virtually every translation of the Bible, including the KJV—one may consult the forward or preface of any translation to verify how the purposes of various translations would differ from how one understands the various purposes of the original authors. Perhaps the primary question should be whether the purpose and function of the CEB is complementary to the purpose and function of the collection and transmission of the canon to subsequent generations and ultimately to the spread of the gospel. Furthermore, the missional purpose of the CEB is not at cross-purposes with, for example, Paul's goals in writing his epistles. 'The Human One' translates ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in such a way that the idiom would not be misinterpreted by the target audience. That is fully consistent with the widely accepted practice of Bible translation into new languages in unreached regions.

The final translation theory with which we will evaluate the CEB is Description Theory, which is an academic approach practiced separate from the training institutions on translation. This approach studies translation rather than prescribing what it should be. Among other things, theorists detect common standard practices of translation that can be comparable to a "client's" job description. The client would be the target reader and it is suggested that in addition to stated goals, there are cultural norms or reader expectations that may be unstated. Chestermann suggests that the study of norms will help to predict the relative success of one strategy or another.[39] In the case of the CEB, the goal of functional accuracy and the missional goal of readability for a reader without a church background might have undermined the Bible's success with the public that actually purchases Bibles. Though the CEB was translated to be read out loud, it does not sound "liturgical" to those who are used to words that echo the KJV vocabulary ("biblish")— that is, the churched public expects the Bible to have an Elizabethan accent.[40] In the case of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, much of the public that purchases and reads Bibles does not necessarily know what the idiom means. Therefore, the CEB's semantically/functionally accurate rendering appears to violate whatever "sacred" or spiritual meaning that a reader has projected into the idiom (as in the case of those who assume that it directly refers to Jesus' divinity). So this raises questions of whether the intentional "norm-breaking" of the CEB would violate any hope of a good reception. However, the CEB was released in an award-winning children's version (*Deep Blue Kid's Bible*) that has experienced considerable popularity.

Therefore, while the CEB may be placed between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence as it claims, its attributes are not apparent to many readers because of its choice of simple contemporary vocabulary over more theological words that are considered the "norm" for biblical language. While it is clear that the language of the CEB is different from other translations because of its purpose/goals, it needs to be recognized that every English translation has its own sets of purposes and goals that are not exactly the same as those of the original authors of the books of the Bible. In fact, many popular assumptions about formal equivalent translations fail to adequately understand the nuances of the actual practice of translation. The choice of 'the Human One' and 'the human being' as a translation of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is an appropriate and semantically accurate choice within the theory and purposes of biblical translation as it has been practiced world-wide, but it is also an example of "norm-breaking" of the religious register that the reading public expects for the English Bible.

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**38** In Skopos translation, the target side purpose is dominant, so that the source text is "dethroned" and the translation is not "source-bound."

**39** See Chesterman, "The Empirical Status."

**40** Some theorists and Bible translators suggest that a translation should retain a foreign character to communicate to the reader that the context of situation, including the culture, was far different from the readers'. Sometimes this is a defense of tortured syntax that is unreadable for lower reading levels, but more often it is a defense of archaic vocabulary. However, this would clearly not be a defense of accuracy in choice of words, but rather a functional equivalent choice that evokes a far different culture (i.e. Shakespearean) rather than the biblical context of situation. Furthermore, it rather retains a *familiar* church register (not a foreign one) at the expense of a clearer meaning in contemporary idiom.

# Conclusion

It has been shown that the CEB translation of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as 'the Human One' or 'the human being' is the accurate meaning of the stock idiom both in the Aramaic of Jesus' day and in the Hebrew and Aramaic language in the OT. The idiom plays a part in the plots of all four of the Gospels in which Jesus confuses the crowds and Jewish leaders about his claims. His repeated references to himself as 'the Human One' or 'the Human Being' baffles the public until his trial before the Sanhedrin when he finally associates the idiom with Daniel 7:13 and possibly to 1 Enoch. Therefore, a translation that allows the narrative and the plot to be understandable is to be preferred. For those who are not taught the actual meaning of the idiom, the traditional literalistic word-for-word translation of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as 'the Son of Man' is either meaningless or misleading both in terms of Christology and for following the narrative of the Gospels. The purpose of the CEB is to use clear English vocabulary that is understood at a seventh grade level by those who have no church background. Therefore, a clear and accurate translation of the sense of the Aramaic and Hebrew idiom was virtually a necessary choice for semantic accuracy, and reflects the CEB's translation theory. It is also a missional choice to render the Word of God in a way that is understood in the target audience's language in current use. However, the majority of the public that purchases Bibles has religious and theological commitments and tends to expect or even demand specific theological vocabulary and technical terms that are part of a specialized religious register, even though they are misunderstood. The CEB engages in "norm-breaking" by attempting to choose vocabulary from registers that are currently in use in the English language in comparable contexts as those that are represented in the source text.

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