

Discourse

Reflections on Participant Reference in 1-2 Kings in Hebrew and in Translation

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Quotes are from NRSV, unless stated otherwise. Underlining is mine.*

Introduction

This is a limited analysis of how the writer of 1-2 Kings refers to the participants in his discourse, and a discussion of how participant reference was handled in the translation of the book of Kings into a Turkic language.

The focus is on 1Kings. Some conclusions are tentative. Not all issues could be resolved satisfactorily. But I expect that the material can be of help for others who deal with the same questions.

The references to King Solomon and to King Ahab are discussed in detailed manner. Due to how this paper developed, King Ahab is treated first, although the chapters about him come later in the book.

Not all persons from 1-2 Kings have been included. The use of pronouns (as opposed to proper noun phrases) is not discussed.

This treatment is written with the assumption that in the receptor language it is not normal for one and the same person to be referred to in many different ways. He usually uses the same noun phrase. This impression needs some further confirmation though. Exceptions are, of course, when different speakers speak about that person, or when the person is addressed directly, or when the person refers to him-/herself; but not when the author reports about him/her.

The problem is that Hebrew does not always follow the same conventions in referring to people. Sometimes people are referred to in different ways, where **the reason for this change is not apparent**. The translator has to decide **whether to keep the Hebrew reference, or whether to apply a more consistent method**.

1Ki 11ff. Prophet Ahijah

Ahijah is an example for how a **person is referred to in a way that matches our expectations**:

In 11:29 he is fully identified as "the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite".

In the following two sentences he is simply called "Ahijah".

In the next chapter he is referred back to by the phrase "Ahijah the Shilonite" – enough to identify him clearly, but without the title "prophet".

Again a couple chapters later (ch. 14) he is re-introduced as "Ahijah the prophet". "Shiloh" is mentioned in the immediate context as well; as the story unfolds, he is simply called "Ahijah". At the end of the story (v18), in a conclusive statement, he is called "his servant Ahijah the prophet".

Later, there is one further reference to him, and again it is a full identification: "his servant Ahijah the Shilonite".

One "inconsistency" is that he can be called "prophet", "servant", or both in the same phrase. But these are all meaningful modifiers, and were kept in the translation.

1Ki 11ff. King Jeroboam

Jeroboam is mentioned 55 times in 1Kings, but only nine times with the phrase "Jeroboam son of Nebat" (11:26, 12:2/15, 15:1, 16:3/26/31, 21:22, 22:53.) (Other noun phrases for Jeroboam are not discussed here.) There is always a good reason why this fuller reference is used in Hebrew, and so it was kept everywhere in the translation as well. The only exception is 16:2/3, where in v2 he is called "Jeroboam" and **afterwards** in v3 by the full form "Jeroboam son of Nebat". These two were exchanged.

The reverse problem – that Hebrew underspecifies by only speaking of "Jeroboam", and a reader of the translation would need a fuller identification like "Jeroboam son of Nebat", did not occur.

1Ki 14 King Jeroboam's Son Abijah

Abijah is referred to three times, each time by a different noun phrase:
(*Quotes from NASB.*)

- V. 1 At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam became sick.
- V. 3 ... He will tell you what will happen to the boy (*na'ar*).
- V. 12 ... When your feet enter the city the child (*yeled*) will die.

The way the boy is talked about depends on the speaker: In v. 1 the author introduces Abijah. In v. 3 Jeroboam, the father, talks to his wife. In v. 12 the prophet Ahijah talks to the mother. Thus, in vv. 3 & 12 we have direct speech, where **differing references are to be expected according to the speaker's relationship to the person that is talked about.**

Translation: *na'ar* and *yeled* were both rendered by the common word for "child". However, since Ahijah addresses the child's mother, in v. 12 the personal suffix ("your") was added for sake of naturalness, as is the case in some English versions.

1Ki 16 Prophet Jehu

- V. 1 The word of the Lord came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha, ...
- V. 7 Moreover the word of the Lord came by the prophet Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha ...
- V. 12 ..., according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke against Baasha by the prophet Jehu ...

Jehu is first identified as "son of Hanani", in the second reference as "prophet" **and** as "son of Hanani", and in the end only as "prophet". The *Handbook*¹ comments: "Verse 7 identifies Jehu as a prophet, and some common language translations have moved that information forward to verse 1 in order to identify him clearly at the beginning of this story ... ". This model was followed in the translation.

One could also argue that Jehu becomes a prophet not until the Lord speaks to him in v. 1; therefore, he is not called "the prophet" yet in v. 1. But it is not unjustified to call him prophet from the beginning, because that is how he was later known.

On the other hand again, the text could be left as it is: in v. 1, an unknown person is introduced by his full name "Jehu son of Hanani". In v. 7, he is already known by name, and his activity as prophet has been talked about, so he is now referred to by full name and title. The use of the title could indicate that his prophesying was not a rare event, but that he had an ongoing role as a prophet. Then, in v. 12, "the prophet Jehu" is enough to identify him.

¹ Roger L. Omanson and John E. Ellington: *A Handbook on 1-2 Kings*. 2 vols. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 2008.

1Ki 17ff. Prophet Elijah

The name occurs 42 times in 1Kings alone. Out of these places, only a few use the phrase "Elijah the Tishbite" – 17:1, 21:17, 21:28.

In 17:1, we have his initial introduction. Then Elijah is talked about a lot through all of chs. 17-19. He is not mentioned in ch. 20. It makes sense, then, that in 21:17 he is re-introduced as "Elijah the Tishbite". As to the third case, the one in 21:28, it is not clear why the identification is needed. It was kept in our translation nevertheless.

The **only** place where the Hebrew identifies Elijah as "Elijah the prophet" is in the key passage about the contest with the prophets of Baal, 1Ki 18:36:

... the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, ...

This is the prayer after which God answers with fire, i.e. **Elijah is called with his "full title" in the decisive moment.** We kept that in our translation.

Besides that, only one adjustment was made: Since Elijah is known to the audience from the Koran, at the first occurrence of his name in the text (17:1), we refer to him not only as "Elijah the Tishbite" (as Hebrew has it), but as "the prophet Elijah the Tishbite", **so the readers would realize that it is indeed him who is talked about.**

1Ki 21:27 is an example where Hebrew is quite brief. The verse starts: "When Ahab heard those words, ...". "Those words" refers to what Elijah said in vv. 20-24. Elijah's words are followed by a parenthetical statement by the author in v. 25f. So, it was felt appropriate to mention Elijah again in v27: "When Ahab heard these words of Elijah, ..." (See the *Handbook*.) **In such cases of clarification, one will use the standard reference for a person.**

In 2Ki 9:36 he is called "**his [i.e., the Lord's] servant** Elijah the Tishbite".

1Ki 16ff. Jezebel

Jezebel is first introduced in 16:31 as follows:

..., he [King Ahab] took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians,

Then, she is simply called by her name, or occasionally "his wife Jezebel".

On the second occurrence of "Jezebel" (in 18:4), the *Handbook* remarks: "**Jezebel**, who is identified in 1 Kgs 16.31 as Ahab's Phoenician wife, is mentioned here in this chapter for the first time. It may be helpful to identify her here as "Jezebel, Ahab's wife," or "Queen Jezebel."" This advice was followed both in 18:4 and also 19:1 at the beginning of an **important new chapter which might be read on its own.** Thus, these are cases where the translation slightly over-identifies someone, in order to ensure ease of reading. – Identifying Jezebel as "Ahab's wife" is preferable to calling her "queen", because the Old Testament does not grant her the title queen.

1Ki 18f Elijah's Servant

He is mentioned only in 18:43, 19:3. He is not introduced properly. 18:43 simply says: "He said to his servant, '...'". An uninitiated reader might wonder "where this person came from all of a sudden". (The servant must have assisted Elijah all day in setting up the altar etc.) The fact that the author does not introduce him might show

that at the time it was considered normal for a prophet to have a servant, or at least that that was so in Elijah's case. If the translator wants to comment on this, perhaps the book introduction would be a more appropriate place for this than the text itself, which would be difficult to expand. Note the German "Hoffnung für alle", though, for an example: At 19:3, they include the underlined additional words: "... There he left back his servant, who had accompanied him until then." [Transl. mine.]

1Ki 15ff. King Ben-Hadad

Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, after having been introduced, was usually called "king Ben-Hadad" in the translation, even where Hebrew refers to him just as "Ben-Hadad". However, in 20:33, where the defeated Ben-Hadad comes out to meet King Ahab of Israel, the title "king" was not used.

1Ki 16:28ff. King Ahab

King Ahab of Israel is talked about in chs. 16-22. In Hebrew, he is referred to mainly as "Ahab" and as "the king of Israel". **The switching between these two noun phrases might come across as arbitrary, and could even cause some confusion about the identity of the person in view.** In the end, the translation should be clear and natural. But one should first ask what the reasons for the switching might be. And, while a few debatable places will remain untreated below, the overall picture of when the author uses which name is pretty clear: (We do here not deal with those cases where other people refer to him; only with the author's words.)

In Hebrew, he is called by his personal name "Ahab" in these places:

1Ki 16:28-30,33; 17:1; 18:1-3,5,6,9,12,16,17,20,41,42,44-46; 19:1; 20:14;
21:1-4,8,15,16,20,21,24,25,27,29; 22:20,39-40,50,52.

The contexts are:

- indicating family relations (son of / father of)
- encounters with the prophet Elijah
- encounters with his wife Jezebel
- encounters with Naboth
-
- the author's spiritual evaluation of him

He is referred to by his title "the king of Israel" in here:

1Ki 20:4,7,11,21,22,28,32,40,41,43, 22:2-6,8-10,18,26,29,30,30,31-34,45.

The contexts are:

- the war against the Aramean king Ben-Hadad
- dealings together with Jehoshaphat king of Judah
- encounters with prophets within the above two contexts

In addition, he is called by the combined phrase "Ahab, king of Israel" in:

20:2/13, 21:18, 22:41.

The contexts are:

- full identification at the beginning of a new section
- historical time reference

Thus, where things relate to his personal or spiritual life, he is called by his name. Where he acts as king and commander, especially in "international" settings, he is

referred to by his title "king". Where the narrative requires unambiguous setting information, the author uses "Ahab, king of Israel".

Translation: Understanding why the author refers to Ahab in the ways he does, does not yet solve the translation problem. What makes sense in Hebrew might still be awkward or misunderstandable in the receptor language. Depending on what the priorities in the translation project are, one will either faithfully represent the author's wordings, or make some adaptations.

At first, we used "King Ahab" as a default reference. Now it is often just "Ahab", sometimes "the King" (for the reasons, cf. on "Solomon" further below). Where his spiritual life is in view, "Ahab" was used, because before God titles do not count. In this we follow the author. The phrase "the king of Israel" will usually be expanded to read "Ahab, the king of Israel". Occasionally it might be dropped.

"The king of Israel" was changed to "King Ahab" in at least one place, where no other nation than Israel can be in view, and where including his name was found helpful for the sake of continuity in referring to him (20:40).

20:38 contains the first reference to a king after v. 34. He is just called "the king", although in v. 38 there were two kings departing from each other, so it is not hundred percent clear who is in view. The *Handbook* says: "The king refers to Ahab, as CEV makes explicit by adding his name."

Particularly interesting is that in ch. 22, **the author speaks of Jehoshaphat either as "Jehoshaphat the king of Judah" or simply as "Jehoshaphat", whereas Ahab is referred to almost throughout as "the king of Israel"**. Does the author feel closer, and refer more friendly to, Jehoshaphat, and more distant and critical to Ahab? That is likely, given the overall purpose of the book of Kings. Another explanation could be that Ahab has been the subject of the whole large section chs. 20-22, and that Jehoshaphat needed a clearer identification than Ahab.

In ch. 22, King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah are both present at a public gathering, Ahab – who in Hebrew is sometimes just called "the king" – has been called "**King Ahab**" in the translation, in order to avoid confusion (e.g. in v. 15).

In 16:29f., Ahab is called "son of Omri" three times in a row: 16:29 reads:

In the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah, Ahab son of Omri began to reign over Israel; Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years.

Why is he introduced twice with the full family-name? Possibly, the author hints that this is a name worthwhile to take note of. The very next verse (30) continues: "Ahab son of Omri [again!] did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him." – The *Handbook* recommends to use "he" in 29b. We kept the full phrase in the first and the third instance, but not in the second one. This is a case **where rendering the Hebrew repetition literally was felt too unnatural**.

1Ki 1-14 King Solomon

The name Solomon occurs 158 times in 1Kings. 38 of these cases have the phrase *hammelek Šəlōmōh* "the king Solomon".

Interestingly, the word order is reversed to *Šalōmōh hammelek* "Solomon, the king" in one special case, namely where his half-brother Adonijah talks to his mother Bathsheba in 2:17. This is easily explained with the personal name having priority for family members over the title.

Where Solomon is not called "king", the name is sometimes modified by family relations ("his son Solomon / Solomon's mother" etc.). While these instances have not been counted exactly, we are left with over hundred times where Solomon is simply called "Solomon".

Then there are close to 50 places where the reference to Solomon is just "the king".
So, there is a ratio of, very roughly,

1 : 1 : 2 for "king" versus "King Solomon" versus "Solomon".

The question is how to deal with this in translation. What are the author's reasons for varying between the three references, and would these reasons be valid in the receptor language as well?

The reasons for the choices by the author are sometimes fairly obvious.

Examples: When Solomon is anointed king, he goes by "King Solomon" (1:39). When God meets Solomon in a dream in Gibeon (3:5-15), he is called "Solomon" throughout. Before God, his title "king" does not matter. In 9:15 we find an account about the forced labor under Solomon. Only in the first verse read we of "King Solomon", then, probably for simplicity, he is called "Solomon" all the way through until v. 26, where a new section starts. Similarly, in ch. 6, after the first two introductory verses that include the word "king" one time, he is always "Solomon".

But there are other places that are more complicated. For instance, in the account of Solomon's wise judgment (3:16-28), his name is not mentioned one time (cf. *Handbook*). And when the queen of Sheba visits Solomon (10:1-13), which is an "international setting", but also involves personal admiration, there are switches between the three above-mentioned ways of referring to Solomon, and it is difficult to explain each instance. The same is true of the passages that report about Solomon's dealings with the coppersmith Hiram (7:13/14/40-51).

Sometimes the writer might well have a reason why he chose one wording over another. Yet, this will not always be transparent to today's readers.

Translation: What did the English versions do? We will cite just one example, where the Hebrew varies a lot, namely in 7:45-51 (*literally*: the King Solomon – the king – Solomon – Solomon – the king Solomon – Solomon). NIV copies the Hebrew. Even NLT and TEV follow it, except for using a pronoun in v. 51.

CEV does not follow the Hebrew, but is too idiosyncratic to serve as a model. Clear is at least this much: Here and in other places (e.g. 8:1ff), CEV drops the title "king" from the phrase "King Solomon" and simply calls him "Solomon"; yet it does not do so consistently either (see 7:13).

I surmise that the English versions have not consciously determined in each case that what Hebrew does is also appropriate in English, but that they did not consider the issues involved.

As to the receptor language, the assumption is that it does not – in the "normal" course of the narrative – use many different ways to refer to the same person. When drafting, we first took the approach of using "**King Solomon**" as the **standard wording** – as a "**full and proper reference**" so to speak (cf. on King Ahab above). A major exception is where his spiritual life is in view, or where God speaks to him etc.

But research revealed two conflicting practices in the receptor language literature. Examining a narrative, someone observed the following basic rule:

- When the subject remains the same as in the preceding sentence, either an implicit subject suffices, or a role noun is used. (In the present case this would be "**the king**".) The form with the most-coding material* (in our case "(the King Solomon)") is not used where subject continuity is given.

* Cf. Robert A. Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn. *Analyzing Discourse: Basic Concepts*. 1999. P. 54.

If one follows this, one will **change many instances of Hebrew "King Solomon" and of Hebrew "Solomon" to "the king"** (role noun)! It is questionable whether this would be appropriate for the book of 1Kings though, which deals with many kings, and where their proper names are necessary for recognition. 1Kings resembles a "narrative" only to some extent.

According to mother tongue speakers, European kings would be called, for example, "King William" initially, afterwards referring to them just by the name ("William") would be fine, but <name + title> would work as well. They said that using the name, as opposed to just saying "the King", will help clarity.

Some other research based on one chapter each from three books by different authors showed this:

- the full reference (name + title) is not used continuously, but can be replaced by either just the title or just the name.

This variability is in contrast to the observations from the narrative above. Consequently, using the **role noun by default is not the only and obvious choice either**.

- *When the subject changes*, an implicit subject might still suffice, as long as the reader can identify unambiguously who the subject is. Otherwise a role noun can be used. The expression with the "most-coding material" can be employed as well. This is more likely at the first occurrence of that person in a given scene, or when it is deemed appropriate for reasons of prominence.

It seems advisable to follow Hebrew in the practice of using a fuller reference ("King Solomon") at the beginning of a section, and afterwards a simpler reference.

One such place is 11:1, which reads "King Solomon loved many foreign women ...". This could be called either a spiritual matter or a personal one. Notwithstanding, the author uses the title "king" instead of his name.

In the end, Hebrew and the receptor language might not differ that much in their conventions (or lack of conventions?!). However, I believe there are still numerous cases where following the Hebrew literally is not the best choice. Every instance needs to be considered on its own.

Variation has its value too; but variation in regard to participants is less free than to other objects; thus, variation simply for the sake of variation should neither be the goal nor an excuse.

In conclusion:

- The receptor language literature did not display one homogeneous practice.
- Consistent reference was not of major concern to the mother tongue readers. But using names was preferred for the sake of clarity.
- It was not possible to produce a final draft that is fully consistent. For an outsider, the choices of mother tongue speakers are not in all places predictable. Roughly speaking, the result in the translation is as follows:

- "King Solomon" occurs about equally often as "Solomon".
- "The king" is used much less often than either of the above.
- At the beginning of sections, there is a tendency to fuller reference.
- In sentences on spiritual and personal matters, there is a tendency to using the name only.

One might need to double-check whether there are more places where a pronoun or even an implicit subject would be enough.

1Ki 20 Various Prophets

In ch. 20 there are three references to prophets:

- V. 13 *nābī' eḥād* "a (certain) prophet"
- V. 22 *hannābī'* "the prophet"
- V. 28 *iš hā'elōhīm* "a / the man of God"

It is not clear whether the man in v. 28 is the same as the one in vv. 13 & 22. The English versions are divided. **What are the options that the author had?** If he wanted to refer to the same person, would he not call him *nābī'* again? If he wanted to refer to another person, was there a need to differentiate more clearly than by using *iš hā'elōhīm*? We might expect the word "**another** (prophet / man of God)", but that might not at all be required in either Hebrew or the receptor language. In our text, we introduced the man in v. 28 as a new person.

1Ki 21 Naboth the Jezreelite

Naboth is simply called by his name in 21:2, 3, 8, 9, 12, 13, 13, 14, 15, 15, 16, 18, 19 – i.e. especially where the planning and the execution of the plot against him are reported, and also where God speaks to Elijah about him.

In some places the fuller reference "Naboth the Jezreelite" is used: 21:1, 4, 6, 7, 15, 16. This happens at the beginning of the story, and when Ahab and Jezebel dialogue about him in his absence, and for the sake of precision when Ahab takes possession of his vineyard.

We found that the phrase "Naboth the Jezreelite" is **repeated more often than would be needed or natural** in the translation. So, "the Jezreelite" was omitted in vv. 4 & 7 (cf. the *Handbook* on v. 4.)

1Ki 22 King Ahaziah

He is only mentioned in 22:40/50/52 [English 40/49/51].

- V. 40 ... Ahab slept with his ancestors; and his son Ahaziah succeeded him.
- V. 49 ... Ahaziah son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat ...
- V. 51 Ahaziah son of Ahab began to reign over Israel ...

Due to the way the author of Kings has organized his work, Ahaziah is first mentioned at the end of the account about his father, then within the account about king Jehoshaphat of Judah, and only afterwards treated more fully in the account about himself.

In v. 50 [49], keeping "son of Ahab" in the text will be good. Furthermore, because he had been mentioned only briefly before, and because there is talk of two kings, we extended this phrase by "king of Israel".

Conclusion

Often Hebrew follows the same conventions that we know from our own languages, or as is the case in our receptor languages. (E.g. prophet Ahijah; palace manager Obadiah.)

Where this is not the case, various kinds of adaptations might be in place when translating. **Name phrases might be extended, replaced, or shortened.**

A name phrase might be **extended** in order to

- introduce a character fully early on. (E.g. prophet Jehu; prophet Elijah.)
- re-introduce a person after a longer passage where he/she has not been mentioned, or in an important section that might be read on its own. (E.g. Jezebel.)
- disambiguate who is who. (E.g. the two kings Ahab and Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah and Jehoshaphat.)

A name phrase might be **replaced** by another one. (E.g. "king of Israel" > "King Ahab".)

A name phrase might be **shortened** in order to

- delete over-identifications. (E.g. King Ahab.)
- avoid unnatural repetitions. (E.g. Naboth the Jezreelite.)

It also happens that an accumulation of foreign proper names of persons and kingdoms makes a verse difficult to read, and that adding titles in front of or after the names helps to disambiguate the syntactical relationships, and to keep participants apart from each other.

Apart from the circumstances described above, **participant references in direct speech** are to be expected to differ according to who the speaker is, and need to be treated accordingly. (E.g. Jeroboam's son Abijah).

There are places where it might well be intentional that the author does not identify a certain character immediately, but **delays naming him**. E.g. 1Ki 22:8 (NASB):

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. *He is Micaiah* son of Imlah."

Appendix on 2Kings

Jehoram king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah

In 2Ki 3, "king of Israel" is used much more often than "Jehoram"; but "king of Judah" is used only a bit less often than "Jehoshaphat".

In translation, a mix is used, because one wants the reader to keep aware of the two countries with their respective kings, *and* of the two personalities – one being further away from Yahweh, one closer to him. But we tried to avoid too much back and forth.

Nebuchadnezzar (2Ki 24f.)

In 2Ki, Nebuchadnezzar is normally referred to as "King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon", in 25:8 as "King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon"; this is

understandable, because there two countries' chronologies are compared. He is also called just "the king of Babylon" (e.g. 25:6).

By and large, the Hebrew phrases were kept in the translation, although this might be an over-identification in some places.

Pharao / king of Egypt

There is diversity in how Hebrew refers to the Pharao. Examples are:

2Ki 17:7 Pharaoh king of Egypt

2Ki 23:29 Pharao Neco

2Ki 23:35 Pharao

2Ki 24:7 king of Egypt

Translators need to decide whether or not to use both titles, "Pharao" and "king of Egypt" side by side. My preference would be to choose one of them.

2Ki 11:4ff: seven-year-old Joash

These verses read:

4 But in the seventh year Jehoiada summoned the captains of the Carites and of the guards and had them come to him in the house of the Lord. He made a covenant with them and put them under oath in the house of the Lord; then he showed them the king's son. 5 He commanded them, "This is what you are to do: one-third of you, those who go off duty on the sabbath and guard the king's house 6 (another third being at the gate Sur and a third at the gate behind the guards), shall guard the palace; 7 and your two divisions that come on duty in force on the sabbath and guard the house of the Lord 8 shall surround the king, each with weapons in hand; and whoever approaches the ranks is to be killed. Be with the king in his comings and goings."

In vv. 7-8, Joash is not king yet. We called him "Joash who is to ascend the royal throne" (cf. GHFA "Joasch, der rechtmäßige König" [= Joash, the rightful king] in v. 4).

Pekah son of Remaliah (2Ki 15:25ff.)

Pekah is almost always identified as "son of Remaliah"; this could be perceived as superfluous in translation. He is also identified as "king of Israel". After an initial introduction, this looks like the more natural way of referring to him.