WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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Category: English Bibles

Yesterday in Church, the reader was reading from the NIV and I was following the reading in the NLT on my phone. One little word change between the two, really made me sit up and pay attention.

In the NIV Luke 1:44 reads:

> *As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

While in the NLT it is:

> *When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy.*

Just a little difference: 'leaped for joy' or 'jumped for joy'. Essentially leap and jump mean the same thing and they are both good translations of the Greek wordÂ ÎµÏƒÎ°Î¹Ï„Î·ÏƒÎµÎ½. But, to my ears at least, there is a significant difference between 'leaped for joy' and 'jumped for joy'.

Quite simply, we don't say 'leaped for joy' much in English. It gives the idea of someone being happy but it really doesn't come alive as a phrase. 'Jumped for joy' on the other hand is a common expression (partly because of the alliteration) and conveys the picture of someone bounding around with happiness.

Personally, I much prefer 'jumped for joy' it's a lively translation whereas 'leaped for joy' just sounds flat to me. Which do you prefer?

There are a couple of brief thoughts I'd like to bring out of this:

Translation is an Art. Translation is not simply about changing the meaning of a statement in one language into another language. It also inevitably involves making some aesthetic judgements about how the translation sounds in the receptor language.

You Don't Just Translate Words: There is not a big difference in meaningÂ between the isolated wordsÂ 'leaped' and 'jumped'. However, when you put them in the context of '... for joy' there is immediately a difference in feel and meaning. I've touched on this numerous times (for example, here) but it bears repeating. Translation is not simply a case of changing words from one language into another. Meaning is found in phrases, paragraphs and utterances. Translation needs to take into account the whole context of what is said, not just the words.