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欽定訳聖書における BE ABLE TO

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BE ABLE TO in the Authorized Version of the Bible

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この論文は the Authorized Version of the Bible (以下 the AV と略記) (欽定訳聖書) における BE ABLE TO の意味・用法の特徴を考究することを通して、初期近代英語の特質の一部を明らかにすることを目的として書かれたものである。初期近代英語と現代英語との相違を見るために、the AV と the New English Bible (以下 the NEB と略記) とを比較検討した。

BE ABLE TO は一般に CAN の補完形として使われるが、the AV には独自の用法と考えられる例も見出される。主な特徴は以下の通りである。

- (1) BE ABLE TO の機能については、the AV と the NEB との間には大きな相違は見られなかったが、単純現在形と単純過去形とを合わせた用例の割合は the NEB よりも the AV のほうがはるかに高い。
- (2) CAN が BE ABLE TO よりも多く使われているという点では the AV と the NEB との間に相違はないが、その割合には極端な違いがある。
- (3) the AV においては、BE ABLE TO が 'have the divine power' という意味で使われる場合が多く、とくに単純現在形では顕著である。
- (4) CAN BE ABLE TO は the AV の時代には類語反復的 (tautological) ではなく、それぞれに独自の意味機能が存在していたことが推測される。否定形の出現が圧倒的に多いことは注目値する。

Abstract

This study seeks to identify uses of the phrase BE ABLE TO in the Authorized Version of the Bible in the hope of discovering some characteristics of Early Modern English. In order to make clear the difference between Early Modern English and Present-day English, the study

Key words: Be Able to, Bible, Can, Early Modern English

compares uses of BE ABLE TO in the Authorized Version (AV) with those in the New English Bible (NEB).

BE ABLE TO is generally used as a supplemental form of CAN. That is to say, BE ABLE TO supplies the forms which CAN cannot provide, or it is used to satisfy requirements of rhythm and sentence balance, for the sake of euphony, and for other stylistic reasons. Many examples of these uses are found both in the AV and in the NEB, but there are also interesting uses of BE ABLE TO that seem unique to the AV. A summary list of these uses follows.

- (1) Though BE ABLE TO in the AV has nearly the same function as that in the NEB, the distribution of the forms is somewhat different. The proportion of cases in which the simple present and the simple past occur together is much higher in the AV than in the NEB.
- (2) CAN is used more frequently than BE ABLE TO in both the AV and the NEB, but the ratio is extremely different.
- (3) In the AV, BE ABLE TO frequently has the meaning of 'have the divine power,' especially when used in the simple present.
- (4) CAN BE ABLE TO was not tautological in the age of the AV. It is noteworthy that CAN in this use appears mostly in the negative form.

1. Introduction

1.1 *Purpose of this study*

This study attempts to analyze the form and meaning of BE ABLE TO in the Authorized Version (AV) of the Bible in light of historical linguistics.

The English of the AV, or King James Version, which was published in 1611, belongs to Early Modern English, so generally speaking its English cannot be altogether different from Present-day English. But when we consider the time-lag, we are inclined to think that there must be some differences between the English in the age of the AV and Present-day English. Needless to say, exhaustive comparison would require large amounts of time and energy. This study merely scratches the surface.

The reasons for studying BE ABLE TO are mainly two. First, I have been interested in the modal auxiliaries for a number of years. Second, among other quasi-modals, BE ABLE TO shows interesting forms of behavior from the viewpoints of syntax and semantics. Table 1.1, which was made referring to Araki et al. (1977: 439), shows part of the interesting behavior forms of BE ABLE TO. Only BE ABLE TO shows the exclusive features of Root Modals,

while HAVE TO, BE TO, and BE GOING TO show the features of both Root and Epistemic Modals and HAD BETTER and USED TO show those of Epistemic Modals.

Table 1.1: The Possibility of Co-occurrence of Quasi-modals with Other Forms

	Progressive Form Can Follow	Perfect Form Can Follow	No Change of Meaning between Active and Passive	In If-clause
BE ABLE TO	×	×	×	○
HAVE TO	○×	○×	○×	○×
(HAD) BETTER	○	○	○	×
BE TO	○×	○×	○×	○×
BE GOING TO	○×	○×	○×	○×
USED TO	○	×	○	×

Note: ×=no-occurrence, ○=co-occurrence

BE ABLE TO seems to present various kinds of problems when we contrast BE ABLE TO and CAN. Traditionally, the relationship between BE ABLE TO and CAN has been described as follows:

- i. BE ABLE TO is basically a substitute for CAN. In Standard English, BE ABLE TO supplies the forms which CAN cannot provide (Coates 1983: 126). BE ABLE TO co-occurs not only with all the true modals but also with BE GOING TO and HAVE TO. BE ABLE TO also co-occurs with HAVE+EN and non-finite forms, both participles and infinitives.
- ii. CAN covers the meanings of ability, possibility and permission, whereas BE ABLE TO is usually said to have the meanings of ability and possibility. But Coates (1983: 124) shows that BE ABLE TO seems to cover the whole range of meanings associated with CAN.
- iii. BE ABLE TO in the past form emphasizes the achievement of the event, but COULD cannot do this. In the negative, however, the difference between *could* and *was able to* is neutralized (cf. Palmer 1979: 81 and Coates 1983: 129).

I will discuss the form and meaning of BE ABLE TO in the AV in light of the information indicated above. Neither a purely formal nor a purely semantic approach will be satisfactory. In fact to approach the problem from one side alone may even be impossible, for as Jespersen (1924: 56) says, problems like this 'Janus-like face both ways, towards form, and towards notion.' My research will keep trying, therefore, to strike a balance.

1. 2 *Materials*

For my basic source material, I used *THE HOLY BIBLE CONTAINING THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS* (Cambridge). Although the year of publication is not given, which seems to be the custom for the Bible, I am convinced that this source provides reliable material because no differences were found between it and the facsimile published by NAN' UN-DO in 1983.

In order to compare the Early Modern English of the Authorized Version with Present-day English, I used *THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE* (Oxford University Press, 1970), or NEB, as my Present-day English source.

2. Form

2. 1 *BE ABLE TO and CAN in the AV and the NEB*

As mentioned above, BE ABLE TO is far more flexible than CAN, particularly in its ability to co-occur with true modals, to occur in non-finite forms and to occur with more complex tense and aspect markings than simple present and past. In spite of these characteristics of BE ABLE TO, we should not forget that BE ABLE TO not only supplies the forms which CAN cannot provide but also substitutes for CAN. Therefore, BE ABLE TO and CAN are sometimes interchangeable, especially in simple present and past. These are the points that need to be considered when investigating BE ABLE TO. For this reason I begin by showing the AV and NEB distribution not only of BE ABLE TO but also of CAN. Cross-referencing will, I hope, exclude bias.

Cross-references for each item follow the presentation of tables showing distribution statistics.

2. 2 *Distribution*

Table 2.1: Distribution of BE ABLE TO in the AV

	Simple Present	Simple Past	HAVE+ EN	With Modals	Non-finite Forms	Total
Declarative-affirmative	27	18	0	14	7	66
Interrogative-affirmative	5	2	0	0	0	7
Declarative-negative	14	11	1	11	5	42
Interrogative-negative	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	46	31	1	25	12	115

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Table 2.2: Distribution of BE ABLE TO in the NEB

	Simple Present	Simple Past	HAVE+ EN	With Modals	Non-finite Forms	Total
Declarative-affirmative	12	1	4	12	6	35
Interrogative-affirmative	1	1	1	2	0	5
Declarative-negative	2	6	5	14	3	30
Interrogative-negative	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	15	9	10	28	9	71

Table 2.3: Distribution of CAN in the AV

	Present Tense	Past Tense	Hypothetical COULD	Hypothetical COULD+HAVE+EN	Total
Declarative-affirmative	28	11	4	1	44
Interrogative-affirmative	74	1	0	1	76
Declarative-negative	168	78	3	0	249
Interrogative-negative	1	1	0	1	3
Total	271	91	7	3	372

Table 2.4: Distribution of CAN in the NEB

	Present Tense	Past Tense	Hypothetical COULD	Hypothetical COULD+HAVE+EN	Total
Declarative-affirmative	165	24	22	3	214
Interrogative-affirmative	198	6	10	2	216
Declarative-negative	221	73	4	1	299
Interrogative-negative	6	4	0	1	11
Total	590	107	36	7	740

It will be useful to survey the data in these tables, paying particular attention to the relationship between BE ABLE TO and CAN. Some striking differences between these two expressions are as follows:

- i. CAN is used far more frequently in both the AV and the NEB than BE ABLE TO. In the AV the number of CAN examples (372) is more than three times as large as that of BE ABLE TO examples (115). In the NEB the difference is even more remarkable. The ratio is roughly 11 : 1, which comes close to the ratio of the Lancaster corpus and the Survey corpus (cf. Coates 1983: 129)
- ii. The number of BE ABLE TO examples in the AV (115) is more than 1.6 times as large

as that in the NEB (71).

- iii. BE ABLE TO in the NEB obviously shows the characteristics of suppliers of CAN, that is, the ratio excluding Simple Present and Simple Past is 66.2%, whereas in BE ABLE TO the ratio is 37%.
- iv. In BE ABLE TO there are no examples equivalent to Hypothetical COULD or Hypothetical COULD+HAVE+EN. As for the Subjunctive Present, there are 10 examples in BE ABLE TO in the AV, no such examples in the NEB.
- v. In the NEB hypothetical COULD and Hypothetical COULD+HAVE+EN (43 examples) are used far more frequently than in the AV (10 examples).

As a result of this brief survey, we can say that the number of BE ABLE TO examples in the AV is larger than that in the NEB, that the number of CAN examples in the AV is less than that in the NEB, and that there is a remarkable difference between the AV and the NEB with regard to the usage-frequency of Hypothetical COULD.

2.3 Examples of BE ABLE TO in the AV and Cross-references

This section gives some examples of BE ABLE TO in the AV according to each of the following items: Simple Present, Simple Past, HAVE+EN, co-occurrence with modals, and non-finite forms. NEB data will be referred to as necessary.

Before investigating each item in detail, we must notice that in Present-day English, BE ABLE TO, like the other quasi-modals, possesses neither the NICE properties nor the other three 'modal' properties (cf. Palmer 1979: 9, Coates 1983: 125). These properties are:

- i. Takes negation directly (*can't, mustn't*)
- ii. Takes inversion without DO (*can I?, must I?*)
- iii. 'Code' (*John can swim and so can Bill*)
- iv. Emphasis (*Ann COULD solve the problem*)
- v. No -s form for the third person singular (**cans, *musts*)
- vi. No non-finite forms (**to can, *musting*)
- vii. No co-occurrence (**may will*)

One exception was found in the AV for item iv: *cannot be able to*.

2.3.1 Simple Present

Many more examples of BE ABLE TO in the simple present form are found in the AV than in the NEB — roughly in a ratio of 3 : 1. Of the 46 examples of the simple present form in the

AV, 10 overlap with those of the NEB. If the AV is taken as the denominator, the percentage of overlap becomes 21.7%. Some examples of overlap follow.

- (1) a. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? (2 Chr. 2: 6) (AV)
 b. But who is able to build him a house when heaven itself, the highest heaven, cannot contain him? (2 Chr. 2: 6) (NEB)
- (2) a. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king . . . (Dan. 3: 17) (AV)
 b. If there is a god who is able to save us from the blazing furnace, it is our God whom we serve, and he will save us from your power, O king . . . (Dan. 3: 17) (NEB)
- (3) a. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him. (Luke 14: 29) (AV)
 b. Otherwise, if he has laid its foundation and then is not able to complete it, all the onlookers will laugh at him. (Luke 14: 29) (NEB)

Interestingly, there are 4 examples in which the NEB uses BE ABLE TO, whereas the AV uses CAN or KNOW. Three examples follow.

- (4) a. But I have heard it said of you that you are able to give interpretations and to unbind spells. So now, if you are able to read the words and tell me what they mean . . . (Dan. 5: 16) (NEB)
 b. And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof . . . (Dan. 5: 16) (AV)
- (5) a. He is able to bear patiently with the ignorant and erring, since he too is beset by weakness . . . (Heb. 5: 2) (NEB)
 b. Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way . . . (Heb. 5: 2) (AV)
- (6) a. Thus the Lord is well able to rescue the godly out of trials, and to reserve the wicked under punishment until the day of judgement. (2 Pet. 2: 9) (NEB)
 b. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished . . . (2 Pet. 2: 9) (AV)

This suggests that some or many of the BE ABLE TO forms are interchangeable with CAN.

2.3.2 *Simple Past*

Statistically, the tendency for the simple past is almost the same as that for the simple present. Many more examples of BE ABLE TO in the simple past form were found in the AV than in the NEB—roughly in a ratio of 3: 1. Of the 31 examples of the simple past form in the AV, 6 overlap with NEB examples. The percentage of overlap, if the AV is taken as the denominator, is 19.4%. Examples of overlap follow.

- (7) a. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Exod. 40: 35) (AV)
 b. Moses was unable to enter the Tent of the Presence, because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Exod. 40: 35) (NEB)
- (8) a. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared . . . (Heb. 5: 7) (AV)
 b. In the days of his earthly life he offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to God who was able to deliver him from the grave. (Heb. 5: 7) (NEB)

As in the case of the simple present, there are 4 examples in which the NEB uses BE ABLE TO whereas the AV uses CAN. It will suffice to present 2.

- (9) a. At Jerusalem, the men of Judah were unable to drive out the Jebusites who lived there, and to this day Jebusites and men of Judah live together in Jerusalem. (Josh. 15: 63) (NEB)
 b. As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day. (Josh. 15: 63) (AV)
- (10) a. Were you not able to stay awake for one hour? (Mark 14: 37) (NEB)
 b. . . . couldst not thou watch one hour? (Mark 14: 37) (AV)

There are 25 examples of BE ABLE TO in the simple past form which appear only in the AV. In the NEB counterparts, 13 examples mean '*fit for*'; 8 are '*could* with the negative' forms,

and the rest signify 'power,' 'have done,' 'has been able,' 'able to as a post modifier.'

2.3.3 HAVE+EN

Only one example of the HAVE+EN form was found in the AV as opposed to 10 examples in the NEB. The percentage of overlap, using the AV as the denominator, is 0% because in the NEB counterpart a different expression is used.

- (11) a. For the Lord hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. (Josh. 23: 9) (AV)
 b. For your sake the Lord has driven out great and mighty nations; to this day not a man of them has withstood you. (Josh. 23: 9) (NEB)

The low frequency of HAVE+EN in the AV does not necessarily mean that the form was not well-developed in those days. It seems to have depended on whether the original text interpreted was Hebrew or Greek.

2.3.4 Co-occurrence with modals

Theoretically, BE ABLE TO should be found in conjunction with all true modals, but in the AV only four types of modals appear, namely, *shall* (17 examples), *should* (2 examples), *may* (4 examples), and, interestingly enough, *cannot* (1 example). There are no examples of BE ABLE TO with *will*, even though *will* is frequently used even in the AV in *will+verb* forms. Examples with modals account for 20.5% of all the BE ABLE TOs in the AV. In the case of the NEB too, four types of modals appear: *will* (17 examples), *shall* (3 examples), *should* (2 examples) and *may* (6 examples). Examples with modals account for 40% of all the BE ABLE TOs in the NEB. The percentage of overlap, if the AV is taken as the denominator, is 56.5% provided that the difference of the modal used in the same verse is disregarded. A typical example is:

- (12) a. I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. (Num. 22: 11) (AV)
 b. I may be able to fight them and drive them away. (Num. 22: 11) (NEB)

(13) and (14) exemplify cases in which the same modals are used both in the AV and in the NEB.

- (13) a. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after

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this sort? (1 Chr. 29: 14) (AV)

b. But what am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to give willingly like this?
(1 Chr. 29: 14) (NEB)

(14) a. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Eph. 6: 11) (AV)

b. Put on all the armour which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. (Eph. 6: 11) (NEB)

Coates (1983) excludes CAN as a member of the conjunction. CAN BE ABLE TO is quite unnatural in Present-day English, but one example occurs in the AV.

(15) And they (i.e., locusts) shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth. (Exod. 10: 5)

It seems that at least up to the early days of Modern English, CAN co-occurred with BE ABLE TO. That is to say, the collocation was not tautological.¹ Visser (1963-73: III, 1738, 1746) gave 11 examples dating from 1515 to 1693, including this one from Shakespeare.

(16) . . . such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it. (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, V, ii, 26)

The meaning of the collocation CAN BE ABLE TO will be discussed in section 3.

2. 3. 5 *Non-finite forms*

Since the HAVE + EN form was already discussed in 2. 3. 3, this section will consider the root form, to-infinitives, present participles, and the 'without-be' form. Table 2. 5 shows the distribution of non-finite forms both in the AV and in the NEB.

Table 2.5: Distribution of Non-finite Forms in the AV and the NEB

	Root Form	To-infinitives	Present Participles	Without-be Form	Total
AV	10	0	0	2	12
NEB	0	1	0	8	9

As Table 2.5 shows, no examples of BE ABLE TO in present participles were found either in

the AV or in the NEB, even though they are theoretically possible.

2. 3. 5. 1 *Root form*

The root form is found only in the AV. Of 10 examples, 8 are in sentences in the subjunctive present. Some examples follow. Equivalent passages from the NEB, in which CAN is used, are shown for reference.

- (17) a. And if he be not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring for his trespass, which he hath committed, two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, unto the Lord . . . (Lev. 5: 7) (AV)
 b. But if he cannot afford as much as a young animal, he shall bring to the Lord for the sin he has committed two turtle-doves or two young pigeons . . . (Lev. 5: 7) (NEB)
- (18) a. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants . . . (1 Sam. 17: 9) (AV)
 b. If he can kill me in fair fight, we will become your slaves . . . (1 Sam. 17: 9) (NEB)

This fact is indeed proof of the widely held opinion that the subjunctive present is obsolete in Present-day English.

Two other examples in the AV follow. Equivalent passages in the NEB are shown for reference.

- (19) a. . . . and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir. (Gen. 33: 14) (AV)
 b. . . . and I will go by easy stages at the pace of the children and of the livestock that I am driving, until I come to my lord in Seir. (Gen. 33: 14) (NEB)
- (20) a. . . . and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? (Luke 14: 31) (AV)
 b. . . . without first sitting down to consider whether with ten thousand men he can face an enemy coming to meet him with twenty thousand? (Luke 14: 31) (NEB)

2. 3. 5. 2 *To-infinitives*

No examples of to-infinitives are found in the AV, while one example appears in the NEB. The NEB example and the equivalent passage in the AV where BE ABLE TO in the present form is used are:

- (21) a. . . . and the place which he will choose to receive his Name is far from you and the journey too great for you to be able to carry your tithe (Duet. 14: 24) (NEB)
- b. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it (Duet. 14: 24) (AV)

2. 3. 5. 3 *Without-be form*

Two examples of the without-be form are found in the AV. Both examples are of the same use, which can be regarded as the reduced participial construction. The corresponding passages in the NEB are of the same construction. They are:

- (22) a. . . . and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield. (2 Chr. 25: 5) (AV)
- b. He mustered those of twenty years old and upwards and found their number to be three hundred thousand, all picked troops ready for service, able to handle spear and shield. (2 Chr. 25: 5) (NEB)
- (23) a. And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. (Romans 15: 14) (AV)
- b. . . . my friends, I have no doubt in my own mind that you yourselves are quite full of goodness and equipped with knowledge of every kind, well able to give advice to one another. (Romans 15: 14) (NEB)

Three kinds of constructions are found in the NEB: 'the reduced participial construction' mentioned above, 'the post modification,' and 'a complement of *become*.' In all, there are 5 examples of the post modification, which can be regarded as the reduced relative clause. Two examples may be given:

- (24) Send me then a skilled craftsman, a man able to work in gold and silver, copper and iron, and in purple, crimson, and violet yarn (2 Chr. 2: 7) (NEB)
- (25) He took away the chief men of the country, so that it should become a humble kingdom unable to raise itself but ready to observe the treaty and keep it in force (Ezek. 17: 14) (NEB)

There is one example of a complement of *become*:

- (26) When a man has no such next-of-kin and himself becomes able to afford its redemption
(Lev. 25: 27) (NEB)

3. Meaning

3.1 Identity of BE ABLE TO

From the syntactical point of view, BE ABLE TO supplies the forms which CAN and COULD lack. Generally speaking, BE ABLE TO seems to be used where CAN or COULD might also have been used but for the requirements of rhythm and sentence balance, for the sake of euphony, and for other stylistic reasons (Visser 1963-73: III, 1750). One of Visser's examples, together with his parenthesized comment, is as follows:

- (27) It is a feble leche þat can not helpe þat is able to be holpen (Apparently to avoid 'cannot helpe what can be holpen') (c1400 Lanfranc, *Science of Cirurgie* 311, 23).

What, then, is the semantic identity of BE ABLE TO? As Coates points out (1983: 127, 128), BE ABLE TO seems to incorporate dynamic as well as stative meaning. Here is one of her examples:

- (28) Lawrence in his best work was able to fuse the two traditions. (Lancaster Corpus 13-C347)

Several examples that seem to have the dynamic meaning are found both in the AV and in the NEB. Most of them overlap.

- (29) a. (=1a) But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? (2 Chr. 2: 6) (AV)
 b. (=1b) But who is able to build him a house when heaven itself, the highest heaven, cannot contain him? (2 Chr. 2: 6) (NEB)
 (30) a. (=2a) If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king (Dan. 3: 17) (AV)
 b. (=2b) If there is a god who is able to save us from the blazing furnace, it is our God

whom we serve, and he will save us from your power, O king . . . (Dan. 3: 17) (NEB)

- (31) a. (= (9a)) And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Exod. 40: 35) (AV)
- b. (= (9b)) Moses was unable to enter the Tent of the Presence, because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Exod. 40: 35) (NEB)
- (32) a. (= (10a)) Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared . . . (Heb. 5: 7) (AV)
- b. (= (10b)) In the days of his earthly life he offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to God who was able to deliver him from the grave. (Heb. 5: 7) (NEB)

The examples cited above show similarities between the AV and the NEB, not the uniqueness of the AV. The matter of what is unique to the AV will be treated in the next two sections.

3. 2 *Divine Power*

There are 16 AV examples of BE ABLE TO in the simple present form, a matter of some interest because all the subjects refer to God, Jesus, or some godly being. The subjects of the NEB counterparts are almost the same, but the predicates contain various expressions: '*is able to*' (6 examples), '*power*' (6 examples), '*can*' (3 examples), and '*has been able to*' (1 example). These figures show that the English of the AV and that of the NEB are not necessarily altogether different. Particularly important are examples in which the NEB counterparts use the word '*power*.' Some examples are:

- (33) a. And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this. (2 Chr. 25: 9) (AV)
- b. The man of God answered, 'It is in the Lord's power to give you much more than that.' (2 Chr. 25: 9) (NEB)
- (34) a. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? (Matt. 9: 28) (AV)
- b. Jesus asked, 'Do you believe that I have the power to do what you want?' (Matt. 9: 28) (NEB)
- (35) a. . . . for God is able to graff them in again. (Romans 11: 23) (AV)
- b. . . . for it is in God's power to graft them in again. (Romans 11: 23) (NEB)

These examples suggest that many of the BE ABLE TOs in the AV, especially when used in the simple present, have the meaning of 'have the divine power.' The BE ABLE TO examples in the NEB seem to preserve this meaning.

3.3 CAN BE ABLE TO

As already discussed in 2.3.4, CAN BE ABLE TO was not tautological in the age of the AV. One example must suffice.

- (36) (=17) And they (i.e., locusts) shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth (Exod. 10: 5) (AV)

If the clause is paraphrased by 'it is not possible that,' then:

one cannot be able to see the earth \equiv it is not possible that one is able to see the earth

Of 11 examples presented by Visser (1963-73: III, 1738, 1746), 7 are used with the negative form, 3 are used in the apodosis of hypothetical utterance (1 example overlaps an example with the negative form), 1 example is in the interrogative, and 1 example is used with *ever*. No example is found in the declarative-affirmative form. This suggests that CAN with BE ABLE TO has the meaning of possibility.

The question that next arises is: what does *is able to* mean? The meaning of this phrase seems to correspond to the definition of ABLE in the *OED*:

Having the qualifications for, and means of, doing anything; having sufficient power (of whatever kind is needed), in such a position that the thing is possible for one; qualified, competent, capable. (*OED*, ABLE a. 4a)

Thus *cannot be able to* seems to mean 'it is not possible that one has sufficient power or ability.'

4. Conclusion

The principal findings of this study may be summarized as follows:

- i. Although BE ABLE TO in the AV has almost the same function as BE ABLE TO in the NEB, the distribution of the forms is somewhat different. The percentage of simple present and simple past forms, taken together, is 67% in the AV, but only 33.8% in the NEB. This means that BE ABLE TO in the AV seems to be more independent of CAN than BE ABLE TO in the NEB.
- ii. CAN is used far more frequently than BE ABLE TO both in the AV and in the NEB, but the ratio is extremely different. Whereas in the AV the ratio of CAN to BE ABLE TO is 3: 1, the corresponding ratio in the NEB is 11: 1. This too seems to prove the independence of BE ABLE TO from CAN.
- iii. Many BE ABLE TOs in the AV have the meaning of 'have the divine power,' especially when used in the simple present. Traces of this usage occur in the NEB, but other forms with the same meaning are used more frequently.
- iv. CAN BE ABLE TO was not tautological in the age of the AV. CAN in this use can be paraphrased by 'it is possible that,' and BE ABLE TO seems to have the meaning of sufficient power or ability. The fact that CAN in this use appears mostly in the negative form is noteworthy.

Note

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