OF BEARS & FOOLS[1]
On Rendering Proverbs 17.12

English translators and commentators[2] consistently render and interpret Proverbs 17.12 as though it were an implicit "better-than" (*tov-min*)[3] proverb:

> Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly. (AV, ASV, Webster's, Darby)

> Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs
> Rather than a fool in his folly. (NASV, NKJV)

> Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly. (NIV)
> Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its cubs than to confront a fool immersed in folly. (NRSV)

> It is better for a person to meet a mother bear being robbed of her cubs
> than to encounter a fool in his folly. (NET Bible)

> It is safer to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than to confront a fool caught in folly. (NLT)

> Better to meet a grizzly robbed of her cubs than a fool hellbent on folly. (*The Message*)

According to these and many other "modern" versions (Appendix C),[4] Pr 17.12 compares two dangers: (1) the meeting between a man and a she-bear separated from her cubs;[5] and (2) meeting a fool engaged in or intent on foolish behaviour, and—as the translations uniformly state or imply—a bereft bear is the safer choice. AV reverses the subject and object of 12a, saying that the bear meets the man; the outcome of such a meeting would apparently be the same.

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[1] A paper written as a methodological illustration for students in a doctoral seminar at Westminster Theological Seminary. Published translations were accessed electronically via various web-portals (19 January 2007).

[2] Most commentaries assume the traditional translation; those that address its validity are noted below.

[3] *Tov-min* sayings compare two things (e.g., a feast *versus* a bit of bread; Pr 17.1) in order to show that attendant circumstances make the less obviously desireable "better than" the more immediately attractive, so that a feast in a house filled with strife is not as good as a simple meal with harmony and peace (cf. Pr 12.9; 15.16, 17; 16.8, 16, 19, 32; 17.1; 19.1, 22; 21.1, 19; 25.7, 24; 27.5, 10; 28.6). They may therefore be considered "counter-intuitive" sayings. Implicit "better-than" sayings—the apparent "type" to which Pr 17.12 is assigned—compare, e.g., wisdom's value to silver, gold (3.14; 8.19), or "jewels" ["coral"] (8.11), implying that wisdom is "better than" those things. There are also a number of *tov-min* sayings in Psalms (37.16; 84.10), Ecclesiastes (3.22; 4.3, 6, 9, 13; 5.5; 6.3-4, 9; 7.1, 2, 3, 5, 8; 9.4, 16, 18) and the gospels (Mt 5.29, 30; 18.6, 8, 9, and parallels in Mark and Luke).

[4] "LXX., Syr., and Arab., do not represent the original. Chald. is also paraphrastic." (Malan 1892, 463). On LXX of this and related vv., see Appendix B.

[5] The earlier English versions say that the bear meets the man (AV (1611); *ASV* (1901); Webster's (1833); Darby (1890); *Hebrew Names Version*; *Amplified Bible* (1987); JPS *Tanakh*); in the twentieth century the strong trend has been to make the man meet the bear (Rheims-Douay (1899); *The Bible in Basic English* (1949); *New Life Version* (1969); *NIV* (1978); *NKJV* (1982); *NAS* (1995); *NLT* (1996); *NIrV* (1998); *Easy-to-Read Version* (2001); *ESV* (2001); *HCSB* (2003); NRSV (1989); *NLT* (1996); *The Message* (2002); *tNIV* (2005); NET Bible (2005); Luther; Elberfeder; Romanian; Reina-Valera [R-A] Antigua; R-V (1960); R-V (1995); *Dios Habla Hoy* (1996); *La Biblia de las Américas* (1997); *Nueva Versión Internacional* (1999); *Louis Segond* (1910); *Le Bible du Semeur* (1999); *Conferenza Episcopale Italiana*; *La Nuova Diadati* (1991)). Of those that I examined, only three (LXX, CEV (1995), and (apparently) *Biblia en Lenguage Sencillo* (2000)) make the bear the subject and the unfortunate man the object.

These translations reflect and endorse the interpretation of this verse as an implicit *tov-min* saying.[6] The common understanding of ursine behaviour supports this reading, but is it in fact what the text says?[7]

In contrast with the European tendency, modern English translations interpret the first line as predicate-object-subject (POS).[8] This reading seems unlikely, however, because syntactical subjects in Hebrew are rarely prepositional objects.[9]

Even less explicably, *every* Western (English and European) version that I have examined inverts the syntax of the second line (12b)—the English renderings in contrast to their treatment of the first—making the prepositional phrase *bᵉ'iwwaltô* situational ("in his folly/foolishness", &c.),[10] rather than the subject (which is how they interpret *bᵉ'iš* in 12a), despite the morphosyntactic parallelism of the lines.[11] We must ask these renderings to justify treating identical syntagms so differently in such a close context.[12]

In studying a poetic text, it is often helpful to view it from a number of vantage points, more-or-less simultaneously, including its semantic and syntactic organization and their relationship to each other, and its morphology and phonology, as well as "rough" and "smooth" renderings into English. This need has led me to develop the matrix used in Table I (below); note that it suggests a parallel reading of these two lines that makes the overall proverb consistent with the "normal" functions of Biblical Hebrew morphosyntax:

Table I : PROSODIC ANALSIS				
Line	BHS (1983)	Semantics[13]		Syntax	Predicate
12a	פָּגוֹשׁ דֹּב שַׁכּוּל בְּאִישׁ	a . b . c	4: 1.2.1	P/NA – S – pp	Q NA
12b	וְאַל־כְּסִיל בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ׃	a¹ . b¹ . c¹	3: 1.1.1	w+neg – S – pp	˷

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[6]In order to "avoid the ambiguity of the proverb owing to its pregnant form", Oesterly suggests "Let a bear robbed of her whelps, rather than a fool in his folly, meet a man" (1929, 140-41). The only discordant voice among the translations comes from Robert Young, whose *Literal Translation* (1898)—aimed at a literal and "concordantial" version based on morphological and lexical consistency; it tends, however, to be "English" in vocabulary only. I shall not attempt to explain his understanding of Pr 17.12: "The meeting of a bereaved bear by a man, / And—not a fool in his folly".

[7]The difficulty of this verse is also noted by, e.g. Loewenstamm, who suggests emending *bᵉ'iš* to *beyᵉ'ušô* or *beyᵉ'ušah*, "in her desperation" (1987), an unattested reading. Nor are the other ancient versions helpful. Forbes (2012) discusses this v., but only in order to explain how the Andersen-Forbes database identifies predicate infinitives absolute (as here).

[8]AV and the few older versions that follow it provide the exception: "Let a bear … meet a man".

[9]Some verbal roots tend to occur with prepositionally-governed objects; the object of *bchr*, "choose", tends to be prefaced by *b-*.

[10]Apart from CEV ("a stubborn fool"), the prepositional phrase is consistently as an "adverbial phrase" of state, condition, or manner, with most versions using some variation of "in [his] folly [foolish way]" (AV, ASV, Webster's Darby, *Hebrew Names*, NKJV, NAS, Amplified [adds "in a rage"], NIV, JPS *Tanakh*, ESV, NET Bible, Rheims-Douay, NRSV, NLT, HCSB, *New Life Version*, and *all* foreign versions checked), which is closely paralleled by "doing his foolishness" (*Easy-to-Read)* and "acting foolishly" (*Basic English*, NIrV); according to *The Message* ("hellbent on folly") and tNIV ("bent on folly") he is not yet acting foolishly. See Miller's feisty comment that "There is a preposition before the word [*'iwaltô*], and it has misled the commentators to translate it "*in*" (E.V.), and to spoil all the text. The whole is thus rendered vapid. The meeting of the "*fool*" and "*folly!*" is thrown out. The commentators have not, so much as one of them, observed it" (1887, 252; italics original). He then, however, proposes a reading that sounds very close to the usual rendering: "**Let a bear robbed, etc.,** *meet in a man* (or *with a man*) *and not a fool in* (i.e., *with*) *his folly*" (252, italics and bold original). Murphy renders this verse (without comment) as "Encounter a bear deprived of her cubs—but not a fool in his folly!" (1998, 126), without apparent reference to the last word in 12a.

[11]This inconsistency affects even some commentaries that discuss the translation. Koptak says that this verse "literally … reads: 'Let one meet a bear robbed of cubs and not [or rather than] a fool with folly." (2003, 436-37), citing Schneider 1992, 143).

[12]Conversely, if *b-* introduces the object in 12a, why does it not also introduce the object in 12b?

[13]These columns label semantic units in order to show the correspondences between lines, and how many "words" [i.e., typographically-separated elements] each semantic unit contains (thus there are three semantic units in 12a, represented by four words), &c. The "syntax" column uses these abbreviations: "S" = "subject"; "P" = "predicate" (the diagonal "/" = "consists of"); "NA" = "infinitive absolute"; "O" = "object"; "w" = "conjunction *waw*"; "+" links "orthographically combined forms"; "neg" = "negative particle". The "predicate" column identifies the morphology of the clausal predicate; a blank means that the clausal predication is syntactical rather than morphological.

The two halves of this saying are morphosyntactically identical (allowing for the elision of the verbal form from the second line).[14] This morphosyntactical parallelism is even more obvious when its lines are vertically aligned, as in Table II (below):

Table II : PARALLEL ELEMENTS					
12a			**12b**		
			וְאַל־	*and not*	cj. – neg.
predicate	*meet*	פָּגוֹשׁ		[*meet*]	[elided predicate]
subject	*a bereft bear*	דֹּב שַׁכּוּל	כְּסִיל	*a fool*	subject
object	*with a man*	בְּאִישׁ	בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ:	*with his folly*	object

This analysis yields the following "rough" and "smooth" renderings,[15] which [more] consistently reflect the Hebrew text than do the traditional and usual versions:

Table III : ALTERNATE RENDERINGS
(1) to-meet bear bereft with-man   and-not fool with-his-folly

(2) Let a bereft bear meet a man,
      But not a fool his folly.
 or (3) A bereft bear meets a man,
      But not a fool his folly.

In the "rough" or "interlinear-style" rendering (1), dashes link English words that together represent a single Hebrew form. The second (2) and third (3) renderings are morphosyntactically permissible and consistent.

If we assume the practice common in biblical poetry of eliding the predicate from the second of two parallel lines, and "distribute" the predicate used in 12a—i.e., reading it "across" both lines—so that it also functions as the predicate for 12b[16], the saying contains two syntactically parallel lines:

Table IV : SYNTAX	
L.	**Syntax**
12a	predicate – subject – prepositional phrase (*b*+"object")
12b	[predicate] – subject – prepositional phrase (*b*+"object")

Since the normal pattern is to supply the same morphological form in the second line if there is concord of subject or predicate (whichever is present) between the two lines, the implied predicate of 12b is also *qal* infinitive absolute [Q NA] of *pgš* (פגשׁ), which is the common understanding of translators and interpreters.

And independent infinitive absolute [NA] (i.e., lacking a finite verbal)[17] is often volitional,[18] but can function as nearly any conjugation. The unlikelihood that the saying addresses a bereft bear ("Meet, O Bear, …!") makes an imperatival reading equally unlikely.

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[14]This elision of the predicate is not uncommon in the second of two parallel lines; the predicate of the first line is to be inferred [mentally supplied] by the reader/hearer, whether adjectival (cf. 16.32) or verbal (cf. 17.7; 28). See Miller 2003. Their morphosyntactic parallelism is reflected in their terminal phonetic parallelism: *š-k-l-b-' / k-s-l-b-'*.

[15]All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[16]The same phenomenon of an elided predicate occurs twice in the immediate context (Pr 17.7, 28).

[17]On the "tautological" infinitive absolute see Kim 2009.

[18]Standard reference grammars of Biblical Hebrew comment more often on Pr 17.12 than on any other verse in the chapter, mainly on either the volitional use of the infinitive absolute or the volitional implication of *wᵉ'al* in 17.12b (cf.

The occurrence of the preposition *b-* to introduce a verbal subject is anomalous in BH (regardless of verbal root or genre), which eliminates the possibility that "man" is the subject of 12a. On the other hand, the preposition *b-* "governs" the objects of a number of verbal roots, e.g., *bchr*, "choose".

The verbal root *pgš* occurs thirteen times in BH; this is the only text in which *b-* governs or introduces its "object" (Appendix A).[19] It occurs mainly in *qal* (9 times, including Pr 17.12) with either an objective pronominal suffix (5 times) or the direct object marker (3 times); its object is unmarked in Jb 5.14 (where it occurs in *piel*).[20]

If the two *non*-governed substantives are subjects of *pgš*, and if the *b*-phrases are objects, as suggested above (N.B.: two "ifs"!), the verse could be rendered thus:

> A bereft she-bear meets a man,
> But a fool [does] not [meet] his folly.

The morphosyntactical parallelism between the lines of Pr 17.12a and b suggests that the "man" (12a) and "his folly" (12b) are the objects, not the subjects of *pgš*, whether the predicate is explicit (12a) or elided (12b). The bear and the fool are the subjects of these lines.

The phrase *dob šakkul* (דֹב שַׁכּוּל), *a bereft bear*, appears two other times in Scripture; both are warnings that use the phrase as a metaphor for ferocity. Hushai described the military prowess of David and his mighty men as he confutes Ahitophel's advice to Absalom (2 Sam 17.8); YHWH described the ferocity of his coming confrontation (also using the root *pgš*) of Israel (Ho 13.8).

Table V : THE PHRASE *DOB ŠAKKUL*	
כִּי גִבֹּרִים הֵמָּה	[You know] ... that they are powerful,
וּמָרֵי נֶפֶשׁ הֵמָּה	and they are bitter of soul,
כְּדֹב שַׁכּוּל בַּשָּׂדֶה	*like a bereft bear* in the field ... (2 Sam 17.8).
אֶפְגְּשֵׁם כְּדֹב שַׁכּוּל	I [YHWH] will fall upon (*pgš*) them *like a bereft bear*,
וְאֶקְרַע סְגוֹר לִבָּם	And I will tear (*qrʿ*) the enclosure of their heart,
וְאֹכְלֵם שָׁם כְּלָבִיא	And I will eat them there like a lion;
חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה תְּבַקְּעֵם:	An animal of the field will split (*bqʿ*)[21] them open (Ho 13.8).

Hushai's image describes their *persons* and *attitudes* in comparing David and his men to a bereft bear: "they are powerful and bitter of spirit [determined?], like a bereft bear". In Hosea, however, YHWH announces that he will come upon them as a bear (meets someone), and then describes their fate rather graphically: "I will tear their "chests", I will eat them there like a lion; a wild animal will split them open".

These verses suggest that a *dob šakkul* was proverbial for extreme danger, which may also explain the usual translation and interpretation of Pr 17.12: "Just how dangerous is a fool? Well, you know how dangerous a bereft bear is? That's *nothing* compared to meeting a fool engaged in the self-destruction of his folly."

Davidson (1901, §88 R2, 88 R5), GKC (1910, §113cc, 133b N2, 152g), Williams (1976) §212; Waltke & O'Connor (1990, 594), Bergsträsser (1962, II:66k), Brockelmann (1956, §45). On the tautological infinitive absolute, see Kim 2009.

[19]This anomaly may explain Waltke's rendering: "Meet a she-bear robbed of her young *by a man*, but [do] not [meet] a fool in his folly" (2005, 44; italics added). The bear, in other words, was "robbed ... by a man", but this interpretation seems anomalous, given the strong preference in Hebrew for ignoring the actor in a passive statement.

[20]In its other three occurrences, which are all *nifal*, it describes a reciprocal event; none has a syntactical object.

[21]The root here is *bqʿ*, generally rendered "split, break open", rather than *trp*, which often describes wild animals "tearing" their prey (cf. Gn 37.33; 44.28; 49.27; Ex 22.12 (the law presumes that the "lost" domestic animal was eaten by a wild animal); Dt 33.20; Jr 5.6; 19.3, 6 (in Ezekiel's parable); Mi 5.7; Na 2.12). The root *trp*, which usually describes a predator devouring its prey, is used of YHWH (Jb 16.9; Ps 50.22; Ho 5.14; 6.1), and of human enemies (Ps 7.3; 17.12; 22.14; Ek 22.25, 27 (comparing prophets and princes to lions and wolves, respectively); Am 1.11).

The combination of the infinitive absolute (for the positive line) and the negative particle *'al* (12b) suggests strongly that this saying was *volitional*.

On the other hand, Waltke suggests an "instrumental" rendering of the *b*-clause in 12a:

> Meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs by a man,
> But [do] not [meet] a fool in his folly (2005, 44).

This rendering still runs counter to the Hebrew tendency to ignore the actor in passive statements.[22]

If, however, it is valid to read the *b*-phrase of 12a as instrumental, then perhaps that is also the function of the second *b*-phrase, so that the saying implies:

> Meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs by a man,
> But [do] not [meet] a fool [robbed of his children(?)] by his folly.

The bereft bear and fool have this in common: both will attack and presumably destroy whomever they encounter, but the apparently incomparable danger of the bereft she-bear is as nothing compared to the rage and grief of the fool who has lost his children due to his own folly; the contrast lies in the cause of their anger: the bear has (presumably) been robbed by someone else, not by her own actions; the fool's children were destroyed or lost to him through his own foolish choices.

The reading suggested by Waltke (*et al.*) has at least two major difficulties: (1) it requires the reader to supply nearly half of line 12b; (2) it implies that a fool can recognize and learn from his folly, which is contrary to the uniform teaching of the book of Proverbs (which holds out no hope for fools).

Interpreting the nouns governed by *b-* as the objects, and the unmarked nouns as the subjects of their respective clauses, we obtain this reading, which preserves both the normal anonymity of the agent and the morphosyntactic parallelism between the two lines:

> A bereft bear meets a man;
> But never a fool his folly.

The natural consequence of the she-bear's bereft condition—enraged, aggressive, and prone to violence—is that she will charge about searching for them, and (as the fiercest animal described in the Bible) will most certainly find someone to "blame" for her missing cubs. She will attack ("fall upon") whomever she meets and the usual result of an ursine-human confrontation will follow.[23]

Fools, on the other hand, are unable to recognize that their own foolish words and deeds have led to the disastrous consequences from which they suffer; they never understand ("meet", "encounter") their folly or its results, and instead blame others for their own troubles (cf. Pr 19.3). Proverbs 17.12 thus confirms the hopelessness of the fool's condition: there is no hope for fools, according to biblical wisdom, because they cannot or will not see themselves and their choices as they really are.

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[22]It also assigns a unique function to the preposition *b-*, which is not used with this type of "instrumentality" (i.e., to identify the agent of a passive predicate); cf., e.g. Waltke & O'Connor 1990, 196-99.

[23]This expected outcome helps us understand Saul's decision to allow David to fight the Philistine champion (1 Sam 17.34).

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APPENDIX

I. THE ROOT *PGŠ*

(all biblical occurrences)

Stem / Ref.	Gloss (*pgš* in *italics*; its object in **bold**)	Object
Qal		
Gn 32.18	[Jacob's instructions:] "When Esau my brother *meets* **you** ..."	vbl. sfx.
Ex 4.24	YHWH *met* **him** and sought to kill him.	vbl. sfx.
Ex 4.27	And YHWH said to Aaron "Go to meet [לִקְרַאת] Moses ...", and he went and he *met* **him** [וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ] ...	vbl. sfx.
2 Sam 2.13	Now Joab ... and they *met* **them** at the pool in Gibeon.	vbl. sfx.
Ho 13.8	I will *meet* **them** like a bear bereft, And I will tear the enclosure of their heart; I will eat them there like a lion; A wild animal will tear them.	vbl. sfx.
1 Sam 25.20	Now David and his men were just going down to meet her [לִקְרָאתָהּ], but she *met* **them** [וַתִּפְגֹּשׁ אֹתָם].	*'et*+sfx.
Jr 41.6	And Ishmael ben Nathania went out to meet them (לִקְרָאתָם) ..., and when he *met* **them** (ויהי כפגש אתם) ...	*'et*+sfx.
Is 34.14	"And the beasts [will] *meet* **the jackals**, ..."	*'et*+noun
Pr 17.12	[the passage in question]	*b-*+noun
Gn 33.8	Esau said "How is **all this camp** that I *met* related to you?"	unmarked
Piel		
Jb 5.14	The [shrewd, wise, & cunning] *meet* (D) darkness during the day, ...	unmarked
Nifal		
Ps 85.11	"Lovingkindness and truth *have met* (N); righteousness and peace have kissed."	no obj.
Pr 22.2	"Rich and poor *meet* (N); YHWH is the maker of them all."	no obj.
Pr 29.13	"The poor and the oppressor *meet* (N); YHWH is the giver of light to the eyes of them both."	no obj.

1. The root *pgš* functions as the predicate of fifteen clauses (Pr 17.12a and b are separate occurrences); in twelve of those clauses *pgš* has an object (its three *nifal* occurrences are reciprocal).[24]
   a. Seven of its twelve objects are pronominal (the exceptions are Gn 33.8; Is 34.14; Pr 17.12(*bis*); Jb 5.14).
   b. Ten of its objects are morphologically "marked". It is either suffixed to the verb (5 times), to the sign of the object (3 times) [all of the preceding are pronominal objects], or to the preposition *b-* (2 times: Pr 17.12a, b).
   c. In Is 34.14, the nominal object ("the jackals") is indicated with the sign of the object.
   d. In Gn 33.8 and Jb 5.14 (the only occurrence of *pgš* in *piel*/D) the nominal object is unmarked. In Gn 33.8 *pgš* is in a relative clause preceded by the object; the relative clause lacks the usual "resumptive" pronominal.

2. The general syntax of *pgš*, and specifically its strong tendency to be accompanied by a marked object when in *qal*, suggests that we interpret the nouns governed by the prefixed preposition *b-* in Pr 17.12 as parallel objects,[25] making the unmarked nouns the subjects.

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[24]The three verses that have *pgš* in *nifal* state that two abstract principles (*hesed* and truth) or types of people ("rich and poor" or "poor and oppressor") meet each other, not that one [in particular] meets the other. The predicate describes both subjects–they "meet [together]".

II. : The Infinitive Absolute in Proverbs[26]

Line	MT (BHS)	Semantics		Morphosyntax	
1.3	לָקַחַת מוּסַר הַשְׂכֵּל צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמֵישָׁרִים:	a . b	6: 1.5	P/v – O[1-5]	Q NC
12.7a	הָפוֹךְ רְשָׁעִים	a . b	2: 1.1	P/v – O	Q NA
12.7b	וְאֵינָם	c	1: 1	w+P/q+S	qv
12.7c	וּבֵית צַדִּיקִים יַעֲמֹד:	b¹ . a¹	3: 2.1	w+S – P/v	3ms QF
13:20a?	הוֹלֵךְ אֶת־חֲכָמִים	a . b	2: 1.1	P/v – O	ms QPtc
13:20b?	יֶחְכָּם	b¹	1: 1	P/v	3ms QF
13:20c?	וְרֹעֶה כְסִילִים יֵרוֹעַ:	a¹ . b² . c	3: 1.1.1	w+S[P/ptc – O] – P/v	3ms QF
15.12a	לֹא יֶאֱהַב־לֵץ הוֹכֵחַ לוֹ	a . b . c . b¹	5: 2.1.1.1	neg – P/v – S – O – pp	3ms QF
15.12b	אֶל־חֲכָמִים לֹא יֵלֵךְ:	d . a¹	4: 2.2	pp – neg – P/v	3ms QF
15:22a	הָפֵר מַחֲשָׁבוֹת בְּאֵין סוֹד	a . b . c	4: 1.1.2	P/v – O – pp	H NA
15:22b	וּבְרֹב יוֹעֲצִים תָּקוּם:	c¹ . a¹	3: 2.1	w+pp – P/v	3fs QF
15:29a	רָחוֹק יְהוָה מֵרְשָׁעִים	a . b . c	3: 1.1.1	P/a – S – pp	ms adj
15:29b	וּתְפִלַּת צַדִּיקִים יִשְׁמָע:	c¹ . a¹	3: 2.1	w+O – P/v	3ms QF
17.12a	פָּגוֹשׁ דֹּב שַׁכּוּל בְּאִישׁ	a . b . c	4: 1.2.1	P/NA – S – pp	Q NA
17.12b	וְאַל־כְּסִיל בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ:	a¹ . b¹ . c¹	3: 1.1.1	w+neg – S – pp	~
21.16a	אָדָם תּוֹעֶה מִדֶּרֶךְ הַשְׂכֵּל	a . b . c	4: 1.1.2	S – P/ptc – pp	ms QPtc
21.16b	בִּקְהַל רְפָאִים יָנוּחַ:	c¹ . b¹	3: 2.1	pp – P/v	3ms QF
23:1a	כִּי־תֵשֵׁב לִלְחוֹם אֶת־מוֹשֵׁל	a . b . c	4: 2.1.1	cj – P/v – P/nc – pp	2ms QF
23.1b	בִּין תָּבִין אֶת־אֲשֶׁר לְפָנֶיךָ:	d . e	4: 2.2	P/v	2ms QF
23.5a	הֲתָעִיף עֵינֶיךָ בּוֹ	a . b . c	3: 1.1.1	P/v – O – pp	2ms HF
23.5b	וְאֵינֶנּוּ	d	1: 1	w+P/q+S	q
23.5c	כִּי עָשֹׂה יַעֲשֶׂה־לּוֹ כְנָפַיִם כְּנֶשֶׁר	a . b . c . d	6: 3.1.1.1	cj – P/v – pp – O[O – pp]	3ms QF
23.5d	יָעוּף הַשָּׁמָיִם:	b¹ . e	2: 1.1	P/v – O?	3ms QF
23:24a	גִּיל יָגִיל אֲבִי צַדִּיק	a . b	4: 2.2	P/v – S	3ms QF
23.24b	וְיוֹלֵד חָכָם יִשְׂמַח־בּוֹ:	b¹ . a¹ . c	4: 2.1.1	w+S – P/v – pp	3ms QF
24.23a	גַּם־אֵלֶּה לַחֲכָמִים:	title			
24.23b	הַכֵּר־פָּנִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט בַּל־טוֹב:	a . b . c	5: 2.1.2	P/v – O – pp – adv – P/a	HNC
24.24a	אֹמֵר לְרָשָׁע צַדִּיק אָתָּה	a . b . c . d	4: 2.1.1	P/v – pp – "P/a – S"	ms QPtc
24.24b	יִקְּבֻהוּ עַמִּים	e . f	2: 1.1	P/v+O – S	3mp QF
24.24c	יִזְעָמוּהוּ לְאֻמִּים:	e¹ . f¹	2: 1.1	P/v+O – S	3mp QF
25.4a	הָגוֹ סִיגִים מִכָּסֶף	a . b . c	3: 1.1.1	P/v – O – pp	HNA
25.4b	וַיֵּצֵא לַצֹּרֵף כֶּלִי:	a¹ . d . e	3: 1.1.1	w+P/v – pp – O	3ms QPr
25.5a	הָגוֹ רָשָׁע לִפְנֵי־מֶלֶךְ	a . b¹ . c¹	4: 1.1.2	P/v – O – pp	HNA
25.5b	וְיִכּוֹן בַּצֶּדֶק כִּסְאוֹ:	f . g . h	3: 1.1.1	w+P/v – pp – O	3ms QF
25.27a	אָכֹל דְּבַשׁ הַרְבּוֹת לֹא־טוֹב	a . b . c	5: 1.2.2	S[P/v – O] – adv – P/a	Q NA
25.27b	וְחֵקֶר כְּבֹדָם כָּבוֹד:	a¹ . b¹ . c¹	3: 1.1.1	w+P/v – O – S	
27.14a	מְבָרֵךְ רֵעֵהוּ בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל	a . b . c . d	6: 1.1.2.2	S[P/v – O – pp – pp]	

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[25]A common function of *b-* with verbs of "meeting, touching" (cf., i.a., Waltke & O'Connor 1990, 198).

[26]Infinitive absolute occurs eighteen times in the book of Proverbs, according to Andersen & Forbes (1992, 26).

	בַּבֹּקֶר הַשְׁכֵּים				
27.14b	קְלָלָה תֵּחָשֶׁב לֹו׃	e . a1 . f	3: 1.1.1	O – P/v – pp	3fs NF
27.23	יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע שִׁית לִבְּךָ לָעֲדָרִים׃	a . b . c . d	5: 2.1.1.1	P/v – O[P/v – O – pp]	QNA 2ms QF QNC
28.21a	הַכֵּר־פָּנִים לֹא־טֹוב	a . b . c	3: 1.1.1	P/v – O – adv – P/a	HNC
28.21b	וְעַל־פַּת־לֶחֶם יִפְשַׁע־גָּבֶר׃	d . a1	5: 3.2	w+pp – P/v – S	3ms QF

<h1 style="text-align:center">III. : Pr 17.12 in LXX</h1>

As the oldest translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint (LXX) is also the oldest "commentary" on the biblical text. Although LXX often gives us insight into the early interpretation of the Hebrew text, this is not true in the case of Pr 17.12, as this brief note shows.

Proverbs 17.12

Line	LXX		Semantics		Syntax	Pred.
12a	ἐμπεσεῖται μέριμνα ἀνδρὶ νοήμονι		a . b . c	4: 1.1.2	P/F – S – O	3s FMI
12b	οἱ δὲ ἄφρονες διαλογιοῦνται κακά		b¹ . a¹ . d	5: 3.1.1	S – P/F – O	3p FMI
12a	It-will-meet anxiety to-man to-intelligent-one					
12b	the and/but foolish-ones they-will-devise evil-ones					
12a	Anxiety meets [encounters/falls upon] an intelligent man,					
12b	but fools devise evil things.					

Pr 17.12 in MT (BHS) & LXX

gloss	MT/BHS		LXX	gloss	LXX	BHS
meet/confront	פָּגוֹשׁ	≈	ἐμπεσεῖται	meets/confronts	3s FMI	Q NA
a bear	דֹב	?	μέριμνα	care, anxiety	LXX read ראב [faint, languish]?	
robbed	שַׁכּוּל	-/+			LXX read באיש צכל? [successful man]?	
with a man	בְּאִישׁ		ἀνδρὶ	a man		
		-/+	νοήμονι	wise, discerning		
and not	וְאַל־	+/-	οἱ δὲ	but the	LXX lacks negative	
a fool	כְּסִיל	≈	ἄφρονες	fools	pl.	sg.
		-/+	διαλογιοῦνται	devise	+3p FMI	
with his folly	בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ:	≈	κακά	evils	n.a.p. noun	b+noun/fsc+3ms

1. Both Greek predicates are future middle indicate verbs.

2. The differences seem too extensive to ascribe to an erroneous *Vorlage*, since they entail an added consonant and the metathesis of two words, one with a change of initial consonant:

BHS	LXX *Vorlage* (retroverted)
פָּגוֹשׁ דֹב שַׁכּוּל בְּאִישׁ	פנש דאב באיש צכל
וְאַל־כְּסִיל בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ:	ואל כסיל באולתו

3. These differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts of Pr 17.12 encourage us to ask how well the Greek translator(s) understood the Hebrew text.

In order to assess that ability, we can see how this syntagm is rendered in its other occurrences. The other two biblical occurrences of the identical Hebrew phrase (*dob šakkul*) are rendered quite literally and precisely (2 Sam 17.8), and with less exactitude, but still within the range of "essentially literal" (Ho 13.8). Neither resembles the Greek text of Pr 17.12.[27]

   a. In 2 Sam 17.8, Hushai warns Absalom against a precipitate pursuit of David, who had fled Jerusalem in the face of Absalom's advance.

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[27]This does not imply that the same person(s) translated all three passages, which seems unlikely given the differences in translation style and technique. It does suggest that the general Jewish community that gave rise to the various documents that we know as LXX understood the phrase.

2 SAMUEL 17.8

Gloss	BHS		LXX	Gloss
that	כִּי	=	ὅτι	*that*
mighty	גִּבֹּרִים	=	δυνατοί	*mighty*
they	הֵמָּה	≈	εἰσιν	*they are*
		-/+	σφόδρα	*very*
and bitter of	וּמָרֵי	=	καὶ κατάπικροι	*and bitter*
soul	נֶפֶשׁ	=	τῇ ψυχῇ	*in spirit*
they	הֵמָּה	≈	αὐτῶν	*their*
like a bear	כְּדֹב	=	ὡς ἄρκος	*like a bear*
bereft	שַׁכּוּל	=	ἠτεκνωμένη	*bereft*
in the field	בַּשָּׂדֶה	=	ἐν ἀγρῷ	*in [the] field*
		-/+	καὶ ὡς ὗς	*and as a wild pig*
		-/+	τραχεῖα	*rough*
		-/+	ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ	*in the open*

BHS:	[You know] ... that they are powerful and bitter of soul, *like a bereft bear* in the field ... (2 Sam 17.8).
LXX:	[You know] ... that they are very mighty, and bitter in their soul, like a bereft bear in the field and like a rough wild pig in the open.

i. The perfect passive participle is a literal rendering of *šakkul* (Gk. root *atekno-*, "be[come] childless").

ii. The second simile ("like a wild pig ...") is lacking in the Hebrew text. Although "double emblems" are not unknown in Proverbs,[28] it seems more likely that this is a plus in LXX than that it dropped out of the Hebrew text,[29] nor is parablepsis likely, given the location of the parallel elements (*k-* ... *wk-* ["*like* a bear ... *or like* a pig ..."] or *b-* ... *b-* ["*in* the field ... *in* the open"]).

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[28]Cf., e.g., Pr 25.12, 18, 19, 20, 26; 26.1, 2, 3, 6, 21.

[29]What makes this less likely is a psychological judgment, not a cultural or textual one. How could Hushai best convince Absalom that his allegiance had changed? Insulting his former master by calling David a pig—even a fierce, wild one— might have convinced Absalom, but might also have raised the suspicion that Hushai did "protest overmuch".

b. In Ho 13.8 YHWH announces his intention to consume Israel as does a wild beast its prey:

Hosea 13.8

gloss	BHS	LXX	gloss
I will meet them	אֶפְגְּשֵׁם	ἀπαντήσομαι αὐτοῖς	*I will meet them*
like a bear	כְּדֹב	ὡς ἄρκος	*like a bear*
bereft	שַׁכּוּל	ἀπορουμένη	*that lacks [?]*
and I will tear	וְאֶקְרַע	καὶ διαρρήξω	*and I will burst*
the enclosure of	סְגוֹר	συγκλεισμὸν	*enclosure*
their heart	לִבָּם	καρδίας αὐτῶν	*of their heart*
and I will eat them	וְאֹכְלֵם	καὶ καταφάγονται αὐτοὺς	*and they will eat them*
there	שָׁם	ἐκεῖ	*there*
like a lion	כְּלָבִיא	σκύμνοι	*lions*
		δρυμοῦ	*of a thicket*
an animal	חַיַּת	θηρία	*wild beasts*
of the field	הַשָּׂדֶה	ἀγροῦ	*of a field*
[it] will split them	תְּבַקְעֵם׃	διασπάσει αὐτούς	*will tear them [apart]*
BHS:	I will meet them like a bereft bear, And I will tear the enclosure of their heart, And I will eat them there like a lion A wild animal will shred them.		
LXX:	I will meet them like a bear that lacks [cubs?] And I will burst the enclosure of their heart, And lions of a thicket will eat them there; Wild beasts of the field will tear them.		

LXX's rendering of *šakkul*, a present middle-passive participle of *apore-*, "be at a loss/in want; be in doubt/puzzled"), is less specific than either the Hebrew text of this verse or of the LXX version of 2 Sam 17.8; perhaps the translator assumed that readers would recognize that the phrase implies a bereft she-bear, and so felt able to use a more generic term.[30]

c. As these two examples (2 Sam 17.8; Ho 13.8) demonstrate, a "literal" rendering was available to the Greek translator(s) of Proverbs, but (as often in the book of Proverbs) the Greek version goes its own way.

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[30]It is highly unlikely that the term here has its "Dialectical" function, "to raise a question or objection" (so Liddell-Scott)—"like an objecting/questioning bear", especially since there is nothing humorous about a wild pig attack.

d. In some of their occurrences in Proverbs, Greek forms based on the root *kak-* correspond to *'iwelet* (e.g., Pr 13.16; 14.18, 24[b]; 15.2, 14; 16.22),[31] perhaps most strikingly in Pr 26.11:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="5">PR 26.11</th></tr>
<tr><th>Gloss</th><th>BHS</th><th>LXX</th><th>gloss</th><th>Comparison</th></tr>
<tr><td>*as a dog*</td><td>כְּכֶלֶב</td><td>ὥσπερ κύων</td><td>*as a dog*</td><td>cj. + nom.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>ὅταν</td><td>*when*</td><td>adv.</td></tr>
<tr><td>*returns*</td><td>שָׁב</td><td>ἐπέλθῃ</td><td>*he goes*</td><td>P: 3s AMI</td></tr>
<tr><td>*to*</td><td>עַל־</td><td>ἐπὶ</td><td>*to*</td><td>prep.</td></tr>
<tr><td>*his vomit*</td><td>קֵאוֹ</td><td>τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἔμετον</td><td>*his own vomit*</td><td>art. + pron. + acc.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>καὶ μισητὸς</td><td>*and hateful*</td><td>cj. + adj.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>γένηται</td><td>*he becomes*</td><td>P: 3s AMI</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>οὕτως</td><td>*thus*</td><td>cj.</td></tr>
<tr><td>*a fool*</td><td>כְּסִיל</td><td>ἄφρων</td><td>*a fool*</td><td>nom.</td></tr>
<tr><td>*repeats*</td><td>שׁוֹנֶה</td><td></td><td></td><td>H + (?) / G – (?)</td></tr>
<tr><td>[in] his folly</td><td>בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ׃</td><td>τῇ ἑαυτοῦ κακίᾳ</td><td>*in his wickedness*</td><td>art. + pron. + acc.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>ἀναστρέψας</td><td>*when he returns*</td><td>P: ms AAPtc</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>ἐπὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἁμαρτίαν</td><td>*to his own sin*</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>{ἃ} ἔστιν</td><td>*{which} it is*</td><td>3s PAI</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>αἰσχύνη</td><td>*shame*</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>ἐπάγουσα</td><td>*that brings*</td><td>fsa AAPtc</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>ἁμαρτίαν</td><td>*sin*</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>καὶ ἔστιν</td><td>*and it is*</td><td>3s PAI</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>αἰσχύνη</td><td>*shame*</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>δόξα καὶ χάρις</td><td>*glory and grace*</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

BHS: Like a dog that returns to his vomit
A fool who repeats [in] his wickedness.

LXX: As a dog—when he goes to his [own] vomit and becomes hateful—
So a fool who returns in his wickedness to his own sin.
There is a shame that brings sin,
And shame is glory and grace.

e. The Hebrew text of Pr 26.11 ends with a syntagm that parallels the end of Pr 17.12b (*keˢîl* [...] *beˢ'iwaltô*); each version has a verbal plus: in 17.12b the plus is in LXX; in 26.11b the plus is in Hebrew. As noted above, the choice of rendering suggests the fool's moral culpability.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Pr 17.12b</th><th colspan="2">Pr 26.11b</th></tr>
<tr><td>כְּסִיל</td><td>ἄφρονες</td><td>כְּסִיל</td><td>ἄφρων</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>διαλογιοῦνται</td><td>שׁוֹנֶה</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ׃</td><td>κακά</td><td>בְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ׃</td><td>τῇ ἑαυτοῦ κακίᾳ</td></tr>
</table>

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[31] A rendering that suggests that the Septuagintal translator(s) of Proverbs identified folly as a moral condition.

IV. : Pʀ 17.12 ɪɴ Tʀᴀɴsʟᴀᴛɪᴏɴ

This table shows the uniformity of the renderings of this verse, whether the version is "literal" (*NAS*, *ESV*), "free" (*NIV*), or periphrastic (*The Message*). They are arranged in roughly chronological order by language.

Eɴɢʟɪsʜ

Wyclif (c. 1388)	It spedith more to meete a femal bere, whanne the whelpis ben rauyschid, than a fool tristynge to hym silf in his foli.
AV (1611); *ASV* (1901); Webster's (1833); Darby (1890)	Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.
Hebrew Names Version	Let a bear robbed of her cubs meet a man, Rather than a fool in his folly.
Rheims-Douay (1899)	It is better to meet a bear robbed of her whelps, than a fool trusting in his own folly.
The Bible in Basic English (1949)	It is better to come face to face with a bear whose young ones have been taken away than with a foolish man acting foolishly.
New Life Version (1969)	A man meeting a bear robbed of her little ones is better than meeting a fool in his foolish way.
NKJV (1982); *NAS* (1995):	Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs Rather than a fool in his folly.
Amplified Bible (1987)	Let [the brute ferocity of] a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man rather than a [self-confident] fool in his folly [when he is in a rage].[32]
CEV (1995)	A bear robbed of her cubs is far less dangerous than a stubborn fool.
NLT (1996)	It is safer to meet a bear robbed of her cubs / than to confront a fool caught in foolishness.
NIV:	Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly.
NIrV (1998)	It is better to meet a bear whose cubs have been stolen / to meet a foolish person who is acting foolishly.
JPS Tanakh	Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.
Easy-to-Read Version (2001)	It is very dangerous to meet a mother bear that is angry because her cubs are stolen. But that is better than to meet a fool that is busy doing his foolishness.
ESV (2001)	Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly.
HCSB (2003)	Better for a man to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his foolishness.
NLT:	It is safer to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than to confront a fool caught in folly.
NRSV:	Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its cubs than to confront a fool immersed in folly.
The Message:	Better to meet a grizzly robbed of her cubs than a fool hellbent on folly.
tNIV (2005)	Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly.
NET Bible (2005)	It is better for a person to meet a mother bear being robbed of her cubs than to encounter a fool in his folly.

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[32]*The Amplified Bible* was the first Bible project of The Lockman Foundation. It attempts to take both word meaning and context into account in order to accurately translate the original text from one language into another. *The Amplified Bible* does this through the use of explanatory alternate readings and amplifications to assist the reader in understanding what Scripture really says. Multiple English word equivalents to each key Hebrew and Greek word clarify and amplify meanings that may otherwise have been concealed by the traditional translation method. *The Amplified Bible* present on the Bible Gateway matches the 1987 printing.

GERMAN

Luther (1545)	Es ist besser, einem Bären begegnen, dem die Jungen geraubt sind, denn einem Narren in seiner Narrheit.
	It is better to meet a bear robbed of [its] young, than a fool in his folly.
Elberfeder[33]	Mag einem eine Bärin, die der Jungen beraubt ist, begegnen, nicht aber ein Tor in seiner Narrheit!
	Let one meet a bear robbed of its young, but not a fool in his folly!

ROMANIAN

Mai bine să întîlneşti o ursoaică jefuită de puii ei, decît un nebun în timpul nebuniei lui.

Better to encounter a bear robbed of her young, than a fool in the time of his folly.

SPANISH

Reina-Valera Antigua	Mejor es se encuentre un hombre con una osa á la cual han robado sus cachorros, Que con un fatuo en su necedad.
Reina-Valera (1960)	Mejor es encontrarse con una osa a la cual han robado sus cachorros, Que con un fatuo en su necedad.
Reina-Valera (1995)	Mejor es toparse con una osa privadade sus cachorros que con un fatuo en su necedad.
Dios Habla Hoy (1996)	Vale más toparse con una osa furiosa que con un necio empeñado en algo.
La Biblia de las Américas (1997)	Mejor es encontrarse con una osa privada de sus cachorros, que con un necio en su necedad.
Nueva Versión Internactional (1999)	Más vale toparse con un oso enfurecido que con un necio empecinado en su necedad.
Biblia en Lenguage Sencillo (2000)	El necio que cree tener la razón es más peligroso que una osa que defiende a sus cachorros.

FRENCH

Louis Segond (1910)	Rencontre une ourse privée de ses petits, Plutôt qu'un insensé pendant sa folie.
	To meet a bear deprived of its young, rather than a madman during [in] his folly.
Le Bible du Semeur (1999)	Mieux vaut tomber sur une ourse à qui l'on vient de ravir ses petits que de rencontrer un insensé pris d'un accès de folie.
	Better to come across a bear whose young someone has carried off than to meet a madman during a fit of folly.

ITALIAN

Conferenza Episcopale Italiana	Meglio incontrare un'orsa privata dei figli che uno stolto in preda alla follia.
La Nuova Diadati (1991)	E' meglio incontrare un'orsa derubata dei suoi piccoli, che uno stolto nella sua follia.

ANCIENT VSS

Biblia Sacra Vulgata	*expedit magis ursae occurrere raptis fetibus quam fatuo confidenti sibi in stultitia sua*
	"Better to meet a bear robbed of her whelps, than a fool who trusts in his folly."
LXX (Rahlfs) [above]	ἐμπεσεῖται μέριμνα ἀνδρὶ νοήμονι οἱ δὲ ἄφρονες διαλογιοῦνται κακά

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[33]Work on the "Elberfelder Bible" was begun in 1854 by Carl Brockhaus, J. N. Darby, J. A. von Poseck, and H. C. Voorhoeve. The New Testament was first completed in 1855, followed by the entire Bible in 1871. Since then there have been significant updates and revisions, including those of 1960, 1975, and 1985 (R. Brockhaus Verlag).