

could determine the quality of the rendering and thus give valuable suggestions for its improvement.

Copies of the checked translation were then made and sent to committee members for home study and discussion at meetings. The committee held all of its meetings at Cebu City, except on two occasions, when it met once at Dumaguete City on Negros Island and once at Oroquieta, the capital town of Misamis Occidental on the island of Mindanao. At these meetings the proposed revision was discussed from all angles: orthography, exegesis, syntax, etc. The members of the committee, all of them church leaders and ordained ministers, made valuable contributions to the work of revising the Cebuano New Testament.

Influence of the Revision

The biggest change resulting from the revision is in the syntactic style. In accordance with the translation principles followed, the new revision has been rendered in the natural style used by all writers in magazines and periodicals in Cebuano.

The new Cebuano version is now used as a basis in the revision of the New Testament in other Philippine dialects now going on in the country, particularly in Samareño and Bicol. Translations of the newly revised New Testament are being made into these dialects by the draft translators who also know Cebuano. The resultant translations have been accepted enthusiastically by their respective committees.

Even before the publication of the newly revised New Testament in Cebuano, three of its books had been published separately and distributed widely. Reports coming from the field are favorable on the whole, and general approval of the new revision, resulting in wider distribution of it, can reasonably be expected.

The Art of Translation

Robert G. Bratcher

"Every modern translation is an interpretation of the original work."¹ As the grandson of Ben Sirach confessed: "Things spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue." To both these statements all translators would give their assent.

In the book at hand, *A Arte de Traduzir* (2nd ed.: S. Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos, n.d.), the Brazilian writer and essayist Brenno Silveira has made some acute observations on the art of translating. With more than twenty years' experience of translating into Portuguese works written in English, Spanish, Italian, and French, the author is obviously well-qualified to write on the subject. This is not, however, a complete

¹ W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation*, p. 1.

study of the subject, but is, as the author says, more in the nature of a blueprint. In order to enliven the discussion, Silveira cites some picturesque and amusing examples of errors into which translators fall.

“False Friends”

Some of the most interesting of these are to be found in Chapter III, on “False Friends.” These are words which, though similar in appearance in two different languages, have totally different meanings. One tyro in the art of translating was led astray by one of these “false friends” when he translated the English word “creamery” into the Portuguese *crematorio* (‘crematory’), a strange place, indeed, in which to make butter! Another one thought “defray” meant *defraudar* (‘to cheat, defraud’). Literal translation may result in ludicrous errors. The French *sage-femme* (‘midwife’) was literally translated ‘wise woman’. One recalls seeing the author of the saying “The proper study of mankind is man” identified as *o Papa* (‘the pope’).

The author’s work itself is not free from some such mistakes. He understands the expression “chew the cud” to mean “discuss violently” (p. 35), thinks that “I should not know him from Adam” means “I never saw him fatter” (p. 44), and translates “it was wicked” by “it was accursed” (pp. 66, 68).

Notwithstanding such mistakes, however, the author has some important things to say, and he says them well. Some of his observations are specifically applicable to the task of the Bible translator.

Faithfulness to the Original

What is the hallmark of a good translation? Faithfulness to the original, he says. This would seem obvious, but the author rightly inveighs against the notion that the translator may take liberties with the text he is translating. There must be no additions, deletions, or rearrangement of the text. (It should be made clear that this has nothing to do with the task of the textual critic in reconstructing the original text; he is talking about the text which the translator has before him to translate.) Translation must be textual, not free (except in the case of poetry); if, however, the textual translation results in obscurity, there must be an interpretation of the author’s meaning, without any commentary.

This faithfulness to the original, however, includes not only the “ideas” but the style of the author as well. “The translator who merely presents the ideas of the author is presenting the reader with a ghost. The author’s ideas are the soul of a literary personality, a soul which, without its incarnation—that is, without the visible, objective, and analyzable manifestation of his manner of writing—remains floating over the pages of the book like the shadows of an apparition.” His words recall the comment of Erasmus: “Language consists of two parts, namely, words and meaning, which are like body and soul. If both of them can be rendered, I do no object to word-for-word translation. If they cannot,

it would be preposterous for a translator to keep the words and to deviate from the meaning.”²

“Word” and “Meaning”

The statement of Silveira concerning “textual” and “free” translation, reflecting Erasmus’ concept of words and meaning, however, while apparently reasonable, bears closer study, for such a Greek dichotomy between matter and spirit, applied to words and meaning, is likely to be misleading. It must always be kept clear that a word has no meaning in itself, but only in the total context in which it is used.³ This context includes sentence, speech, or literary work, thought processes, culture, and intent of the one who uses the word for communicating meaning. The arbitrary conjunction of letters, in writing, to express visually the sound which, in talking, conveys an idea, has actually no meaning *in itself*. Of itself it is a dead thing that comes to life only when, in the context referred to, it is used to express thought.

To take an example, the arbitrary grouping of the four letters *w*, *o*, *r*, and *m* into the visual symbol *worm* is used mostly to designate a certain species of small, crawling animals. One of these is further identified as a “bookworm,” since it preys on books. This does not mean, however, that the symbol “bookworm,” as such, is the body, of which the meaning “small, crawling animal which preys on books” is the soul, for the visual symbol “bookworm” means nothing outside a context in which it assumes meaning. To refer to a man as a “bookworm” is not, therefore, to separate the “body” of the word from its “soul,” for in the total context of the statement “John Doe is a bookworm” the symbol incarnates a specific meaning and thus becomes a “word,” thereby establishing intelligible communication. There are no “words” existing independently of “meaning”; neither are there “ideas” or “meaning” separable and apart from “words.” Rather, “ideas” exist only *in* words, and the arbitrary groupings of letters are “words” only when they *incarnate* ideas. Words are not so much the instruments of ideas as their incarnation, for “meaning” or “ideas” do not exist in a disincarnate state; they exist only in becoming incarnate in words.

Their incarnation, however, is not confined to any single symbol, as is obvious, and a symbol is not necessarily restricted to one meaning. An idea may become incarnate in different symbols, and it is not to be presumed that there is only one “true” incarnation, while all other incarnations represent in some way a deviation from the true one. To incarnate the idea that John Doe is devoted to the reading of books, it is just as valid, just as real, just as true, to say he is “a bookworm” as to say he is “studious” or “an avid reader of books”; one symbol, in the total context, is just as real an incarnation of the intended meaning as the other. So it is a mistake to think that the symbolic or metaphorical use of a word constitutes a departure from the supposedly primary and

² Quoted from Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³ Cf. E. A. Nida, “Meaning and Translation,” *The Bible Translator*, VIII:3 (July 1957), pp. 97—108.

true literal meaning of this "arbitrary symbol" which is called a word. For, it should be repeated, words do not exist in isolation, and the visual symbol "bookworm" has no meaning whatsoever until and except it comes to life in the "idea" which indwells it. So, instead of "words" and "meaning" being separable, as Erasmus would have it, in reality they are inseparable, neither one having an existence apart from the other, each one indispensable to the other.

We would, therefore, demur at the author's distinction between "textual" and "free" translation. A translation is either accurate or inaccurate, faithful or unfaithful; that is really the only distinction to be made.

A word-for-word "translation," therefore, may be false. For, besides the language, the translator must know the "history, literature, cultural development, and environment of the country whose existence the literary work reflects"—and, we might add, of the receptor language into which the work is being translated. Literally to translate the beatitude of Mt. 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," into Portuguese is to proclaim the happiness of the weak-minded! Herein is true the Italian saying, *Traduttore, traditore* 'to translate is to betray'.

Two New Testament Examples

The four-word account of Stephen's death (Acts 7:60) reads, *kai touto eipōn ekoimēthē* 'and this having-said he-slept'. There is no doubt that the author is saying that Stephen ceased living and became dead. Yet he said (if we apply the false standard that a word has one "primary" meaning and other "secondary" meanings) that Stephen "slept." Should a translation, then, say that Stephen passed from wakefulness into sleep? It would obviously not mean what the text meant. In some cultures it would be understood as meaning that Stephen fell asleep, while in others the notion of "soul sleep" would be involved. So we must translate, "he died." But is that the end of the matter? Why did not the author write *apethanen* 'he died', but wrote instead *ekoimēthē* 'he slept'? Here, then, the total context (which includes the New Testament use of the word, the Christian concept, in that time, of the death of the believer, the intent of the author, and the reaction of the readers) will determine for the translator what the author meant.

To take another example, we may presume to say that the verb "to come" is generally used to express arrival at one place after the spatial removal and transference (of the person, or object) from another. In Mk. 1:14 Jesus "came" to Galilee. We know where He came *from*, the place *to which* He came, and *how* the transfer was effected. But when He says, "I came," in Mk. 2:17, what is the point of departure, what kind of transfer is implied and how was it effected, and what is the point of arrival? Someone will say, "That is the job of the interpreter, not of the translator." He is right—and wrong—for translating is interpreting, and in certain cultural contexts to use the equivalent of the verb "come" in a translation of Mk. 2:17 may result in a gross misinterpretation of the passage, which is to say, a false translation.

Humility

Besides faithfulness, which is the cardinal virtue of the translator, deep humility is also required. The translator, confronting his text, must constantly remind himself that he is not the co-author and must always resist the temptation to become one. His task is to reproduce as exactly as possible, consonant with the language and culture patterns of the receptor language, that which is communicated in another language. This means that a translator must not "improve" the text he is translating: "Some works, in translation, are better than the original, but they are *not* faithful." Humility, then, is indispensable. The translator needs "the patience of a Benedictine and the humility of a Trappist monk."

A translation must read as though it had been written in the receptor language, in a style and manner corresponding to the time and environment in which the original was written. On the part of the translator this requires the fine skill of walking a tightrope without falling into obscurantism or anachronism. As an example of the latter, in the Montgomery translation of the question concerning the payment of tax to the Caesar, in Mk. 12:15 Jesus asks for a "dollar" (presumably a "cart-wheel," though "dollar" alone ordinarily means a dollar *bill*), while in Mt. 22:19 and Lk. 20:24 he asks for a "shilling." Beside the wide difference in value between the two, and between them and the coin for which Jesus asked, to expect to find Tiberius' effigy and inscription on a silver dollar of the United States of America, or on a shilling of the United Kingdom, is nothing less than ludicrous.

This combination of faithfulness and humility, therefore, will keep the translator from a wooden literalness which is devoid of meaning, on the one hand, and a brilliant improvisation which goes far beyond what the author said, on the other. As an example of the former, one may cite the New World's rendering of John 1:18, "the only-begotten god who is in the bosom position with the Father," which is certainly not intelligible English, much less an accurate translation of *monogenês theos ho ôn eis ton kolpon tou patros*; as an example of the latter, Phillips' translation of 2 Tim. 4:8, "to all those who have loved what they have seen of Him," is a wonderful thought, but hardly represents what was meant by *pasi tois êgapêkosi tên eiphaneian autou*.

A Good Translation

A good modern (English) translation, then, will read in such a way as to appear that it had been produced in English by an American (or Briton) writing at the time the original was written, reflecting the total context of the original work, but in language and terms intelligible in our time. On a very elementary level, this means that in a modern translation of Acts 27 Paul will still travel to Rome in a sailing vessel, not on a steamship. When dealing with passages which reflect theological, psychological, and cosmological concepts, the same principle must prevail. The cosmology of the Book of Job, the psychology of Ecclesiastes, the eschatology of the Psalms must in no way be modernized. No false plea in favor of the "timelessness" or "eternal contemporaneousness" of the

Word of God must influence the translator. Theological, psychological, cosmological, and eschatological concepts are all expressed in terms of Hebrew culture and faith, and the translator has no right to transfer these concepts into equivalent concepts of his own time and culture.

A faithful translation into English of the books of the New Testament will reflect the fact that they were written nearly two thousand years ago mostly by Jewish Christians, and not yesterday by an American (or British) modern-day Christian, and that they express early Christian concepts in terms of a Semitic culture, largely in Semitic thought-patterns dressed in Greek clothes (we cannot speak here of a Greek "incarnation," for the Semitic thinking and, in many cases, literary style, have not been incarnated into Greek, but only assumed a Greek dress, or mask).

The task is doubly complicated when a translation is being made into a language where there is no Christian tradition upon which to build and where the translation itself may be the first presentation of the Christian faith. How far can that fact affect the translation? (This, one realizes, is to raise more questions than one can settle here.) To take a specific example, what if, in the particular culture of that language, death by crucifixion is unknown? In the interests of intelligibility, then, may a translation have Jesus put to death by hanging, or strangling, or stoning, or some other method known and used by the people for whom the translation is being made? This is fairly simple, and the answer is obvious. The fact of Jesus' death and figures allied to it ("I am crucified with Christ," "Take your cross," etc.) must conform to the historical fact that Jesus was put to death by the Romans in the first century A.D.

The Philological View and the Incarnation

Committed, as we are, to the philological view of translation (as opposed to the traditional and inspirational views),⁴ the translator's task is finally governed by the incarnational understanding of God's self-revelation, by which the Word of God became flesh and dwelled among men "for us and for our salvation." It is in this comprehension of the true historicity of God's redemptive self-revelation that the translator is kept from investing the words of man with qualities of finality or perfectibility, attributable only to God, on the one hand, or of divorcing God from His Word, on the other. God does not withdraw from the Incarnation; He does not separate Himself from His Word, which became flesh under certain historical conditions, at a certain time, in a certain place, and *in a certain person*. With this concept to govern him, the translator will (to change the figure) strive to find the proper earthen vessels in which to contain the priceless treasure of God's revelation. This he will do with faithfulness, with humility, and, above all, with a sense of gratitude for being allowed to participate, in his own generation, in the never-ending task of communicating the Gospel, so that all peoples may truly say, "In our own tongues we hear them telling the mighty works of God."

⁴ Schwarz, *op. cit.*