
Translation from the Other Side: Process before Product or “In Defense of Lost Causes”

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The Bible Translator

2018, Vol. 69(2) 150–165

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DOI: 10.1177/2051677018785420

journals.sagepub.com/home/tbt



Abstract

In Western scholarship, descriptions of translation have emphasized instrumentality and outcome, leaving one to wonder where the translator as human being is in this product-oriented field. Bible translation is equally affected by this tendency. In fact, recent developments affecting the Bible translation mission, including an infusion of funding which comes with a focus on technology and the expectation of increased speed to product, make questions about the translator and translation as process all the more acute. This essay suggests that a perspective on translation has been lost or obscured, and seeks to look at translation “from the other side”—the side of anthropology, which allows translation to be (re)considered as a serious human endeavor, a feature of human life-in-movement, a meaningful and meaning-making process.

Keywords

metaphors for translation, anthropology of translation, translation as process

Introduction

What lies beyond [common sense] involves a Leap of Faith, faith in Lost causes that, from the space of skeptical wisdom, cannot but appear as crazy. (Žižek 2008, 2)

From the time I first entered the UBS world and work down to the present day, the translation mission—the tools, the theory to some extent, the

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people, and the “interested” supporting constituencies—has undergone constant change. In “the old days,” it was precisely veteran colleagues such as David Clark who could dependably speak wisdom into our situations of uncertainty. If I get the chance, I’ll have to ask him if he possibly foresaw the shape the Bible translation mission would assume in the second decade of the twenty-first century (which is still underway).

The context of the reflections that follow—the current status quo of the Bible translation mission—must be briefly and fairly sketched. An extremely well-intentioned coalition of supportive investors has emerged. As smart investors will do, they first “kicked the tires” of the translation mission as run by the major participating agencies. Duly appreciated were the positive developments: the translation ground already covered, the hundreds of projects underway, ParaText and the ICAP end-to-end training, support, and publishing environment, the general good will among the Bible agencies, and the potential of their experienced and well-trained workforces around the world. There followed the question: How in this day and age of technology could there possibly be languages without Bibles? And our friends were introduced to the obstacles, delays, hindrances, logjams, and so on and so forth, responsible for the malady now known as Bible poverty. Not surprisingly, the “well, that’s just how it is in the field” explanation would not satisfy business people who confronted and solved such problems on a daily basis.

The collective conclusion (I oversimplify) was that the current approach had run out of gas: a problem exists. The task is unfinished, the calculus of which consists of: (a) the length of time it takes to complete translations; (b) diminished funding. A solution is needed, which must involve increased speed, acceleration of the translation process, for which technology (including possible alternative translation solutions), training, and the addition of key staff would be funded. Enthusiasm begat enthusiasm, and the availability of fresh and much-needed support begat new and renewed commitments according to a recalculated (shortened) schedule of delivery. Yet the core—and the risk—of this redesign is a wager that has been placed on “the short term.” The product is the prize; technology offers some assurances for the short term, what can be predictably done in X number of years. What is assumed is that the short-term product will take care of the long- or longer-term realities.

There is certainly much to celebrate here. But there is a perspective that seems lost in all of this, another angle from which to reflect upon our current events. The convergence of technology, speed, eschatological deadlines, and perhaps a predominance of Western values seems to have slipped translation into a paradigm of product over process. This is nothing new (see

below). Nevertheless, it is a paradigm involving some risks, one of which is the reduction of translation to pure instrumentality, putting quite out of mind the notion of translation as a meaningful human activity in itself, and in itself a process of enlivenment for the host community. It is a noble “urgency” that makes the speed-wager and seeks to eradicate Bible poverty as swiftly as possible, but it is in such moments of urgency, and in the clamor of their supporting messages, that serious longer-term issues might be minimized or forgotten altogether. And so I ask, as a modest tribute to David, What might translation look like when viewed from the other side?

I. “Never the only possible way”: metaphors of closure and voices of opening

The current way of thinking and speaking about translation is never the only possible way. (Hermans and Steconi 2002, 14)

A. Metaphors

In 2002, in a moderately provocative speech delivered to translators working within the European Commission on Translation, Theo Hermans and Ubaldo Steconi began by asserting, “questionnaires and statements provide ample evidence of both professional and more occasional translators consistently describing their work in terms of voluntary servitude” (2002, 1). They quickly distinguished themselves, as translation historians and theoreticians, from their audience of translation practitioners. But Hermans described this difference in terms of the analogy of art historians and the way they, in their scholarly reflection, differ from and relate to modern painters: art historians do not tell painters how to paint; rather, “the academics *add* to the painters’ . . . work by *reflecting on it*” (1). Their premise was expressed in the title of their message: “Translators as Hostages of History.” Their demonstration of its validity came by way of a survey of the metaphors used to describe translation and translators through history. And from Cicero and St. Jerome in antiquity, down to the postcolonial and feminist reflections of our own era, the chief metaphors are rolled out and briefly examined—the implications of Greek and Latin verbs (imitation, transfer, movement, transport), translation of words versus meaning, fidelity and faithfulness, images such as “changing clothes” and “pouring liquid from one container to another,” modern description in terms of source and target, form and function, purpose and goals. And in all this, whether translation or the translator is in mind, the reference point is the translated product.

The Functionalist school, touched on only briefly among modern developments, illustrates the tendency. Often reduced to one of its descriptors, “*Skopostheorie*” has contributed the “translation brief” to our work. As this school’s internal arguments reflect, functionalism in its most radical form insisted that a translation’s success was chiefly measured by the translator’s fulfillment of the requirements of the brief (loyalty emerges as an ethical consideration), the evidence of which would be demonstrated from the product as assessed by the commissioning client. Christiane Nord, of course, has problematized this radical view, insisting that the translator’s loyalty is indeed a matter of obligation to client (brief) but must also involve the translator’s loyalty to the source text (ST) (1997/2007; cf. Vermeer 1989, 221–32). Even so, one cannot help but see the continued focus on the target text (TT), the product, as the measure of translation. Functionalism also raised the visibility of the activity of translators, the things they do, the ways they work, and so on, and in so doing helped to put this activity on the map of “serious things that human beings do,” but this humanizing focus blurs when translation is monetized.

As Hermans and Stecconi’s speech comes to an end with final considerations of modern and postmodern conceptions, the creaking of a hinge can be heard. In the description of Walter Benjamin’s reflections on “The Task of the Translator” (2012), there is the slightest glimmer of something bigger, an opening in spite of the tendentious closure of metaphors. It comes in Benjamin’s conception of the ideal language that all human languages seek but fail on their own to express, but that translation may yet reach. A dream perhaps, but there is something of the image of translation as conciliation and hope in this yearning (messianic: see Benjamin 2012, 75–83, esp. 78–79; but see Berman 1999, 31–33, and Apter’s discussion of Berman in 2013, 760 [epub]). The postcolonial and feminist discourses can be seen to humanize the activity of translation in their own ways. Through such voices, translation becomes a means of critical response (translation as rewriting, as having an agenda beyond the source text), of human intervention and protest, and the activity itself, taken up by those “in the margins” (the formerly or currently “silenced,” etc.), becomes a mode of expressing, and an instrument of, self-determination.

The treatment of Hermans and Stecconi is limited mainly to European reflection, which is perhaps appropriate in view of the audience they addressed. And as we will see, although still fixated on translation as product, studies that get out beyond the Eurocentric to a global consideration of translation enrich the concept. Ricoeur, two years later, brought forward the concept of hospitality (see 2004, 40, and the reference to Jervolino 2000, 57–69). With that metaphor, it becomes possible to reconceptualize the

rather static notions of source text and target community so as to emphasize translation as dynamic human interaction, involving all the possibilities, vulnerabilities, and risks of the opening up that is hospitality. For Ricoeur, human diversity is the core reality, alterity is a value, and translation is a means by which those who are “other to each other” (as well as to themselves) might effectively embrace difference in the creation of something new and enriching for human community—as opposed to understanding translation as a means of reducing or neutralizing alterity. In Ricoeur’s reflections translation as a textual outcome is still very much in mind, but in his valorization of difference and hospitality, the way is clear for the very activity of translation to (re)acquire value as a human act of mediation—not entirely separate from a translational outcome (product, message, understanding) but as a fundamental way of being human that facilitates appreciation of the other.

B. An “untranslatable”

At about the same time, we learned, by way of the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (Cassin 2004; trans. 2014), that “translation” is an untranslatable term. What can this mean? “Untranslatability” recognizes the instability and contextual nature of languages. As a feature of languages, “the untranslatable becomes a way of thinking about the specificity of languages and cultures, a call to attend to the singularity of written expression in particular places at particular times” (Cronin 2017, 17). As Cassin demonstrates in the entry “To Translate,” the point is not that “translation” cannot be defined, but rather that it acquires its meanings in the multiple cultural and linguistic contexts in which it is practiced. Here too the focus is mainly Eurocentric—everything begins with Greek and Latin, and translation as product reigns supreme. But the “genius” of the translator is mentioned once, and translation in the Arabic-speaking world in connection with the Qur’ān is briefly considered. On the whole, the sheer diversity of this “untranslatable” term becomes clear. Its multiplicity invites translation to be regarded from any number of possible angles, or as we would say, from an “other side.”

C. Other voices

The particular “other side” in mind is put into relief in a still more recent reflection on the definition(s) of translation. In her important book, *Enlarging Translation* (2010, 54–106), Maria Tymoczko surveyed the various definitions of translation. She went beyond Eurocentric thinking, which has dominated the discourse, to include Indian, Arabic, Chinese,

Sub-Saharan African, and Malayo-Polynesian conceptions, within which translation acquires features such as storytelling, narration, and decomposition (of original)/recomposition (in the TT; 2010, 71). Although translation as product remains dominant, she acknowledges that “the terms for translation often . . . also refer to a class of activities, actions, and processes” (2010, 105).

It is this possible shift of perspective—from product to process—that we seek to explore by opening up reflection on translation to the observations about human life coming from current anthropology and sociology.

D. FOBAI

But as we move, we are mindful of the current thinking. The document approved by the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) in April 2017 (“Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation”) is a very thorough and thoughtful document. It is concerned both with principles and procedures, the latter in fact taking up by far the majority of space. In both sections, the assumed index of success is the translated product. But attention is given to what we might term “host” community involvement. Whether perceived or not, this latter human theme problematizes the simplistic reduction of translation quality or success to a product, by inviting thinking about translation as a human activity that takes place on the axis of local community and society. An “other space” for reflection opens; translation might be seen from the “other side.”

II. The other side of translation: an anthropology of translation

I want to place translators within the general frame of intercultural communication, and I do not think any substantial ethics can be formulated without reference to the many forms of social involvement included within that frame. We must consider all things that translators can do. . . . It is no longer enough to look at translation in its traditional narrow senses. (Pym 2012, 171–72)

The role of “product” in our thinking about translation needs no further explanation—it is there, it will continue to be there, and it will continue to affect our work—but to what extent, and will the effects be negative or positive? When translation is understood mainly in terms of “instrumentality,” product overpowers process, and successful translation is the cessation of movement. As Michael Cronin suggests, the translation that serves the global commercial adventure is designed to stop language’s movement, to

freeze it into reliable frames (his illustration: Google’s “translate this page” functionality; 2017, 29). Translation from “the other side” seeks to explore translation as a human activity, with the emphasis on process. The thinking of some key individuals will figure prominently in what follows. But one in particular got the ball rolling.

For its Triennial Translation Workshop at Iguassu Falls in May 2003, the UBS had invited a translation studies scholar named Anthony Pym to address the theme of the ethics of translation. During a week of lectures, he introduced his perspective on translation as a human and intercultural activity—and as such, a phenomenon subject to the modes of research and reflection employed by the humanities and human sciences (history, literary theory, psychology, sociology, anthropology). Several weeks later in Misano, Italy, he explained to me his perspective on translation ethics: “When the topic of ethics and translation comes up, among all the questions that might be relevant, I ask first of all, ‘Where are the translators in all of this?’”

How are we to understand translation when we start with people? How might we rethink translation as a human, creative cultural activity that brings “newness” into human society?

A. *Anthropology and the openness of life*

What is the meaning of human existence? This is of course the question that has kept philosophy in business, and provoked a good deal of religious reflection. The ancient texts parse matters of human freedom in ancient ways. Here I am more interested in hybrid approaches to this question taken by contemporary scholarship, prompted especially by the multiple urgencies of globalization, global warming, depletion of natural resources, and political chaos. Religion and ancient voices are not excluded from the conversation, but the amalgamation of anthropology, philosophy of science, and sociology comes first.

Bruno Latour suggested that anthropology offers the best tools for studying the hybrid networks that make up the modern world, because anthropology aims to study everything in relation to everything else (Latour 1993, 14, 91). The influence of Latour upon what follows will become apparent, but I am mainly thinking within the frame constructed by Tim Ingold (whose work has been significantly informed by engagement with Latour and Deleuze, among others).

Ingold offers the following definition: “Anthropology . . . is a sustained and disciplined inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life” (2011, 3). Yet (and here chiefly is the *raison d’être* of his work),

generations of theorists, throughout the history of the discipline, have been at pains to expunge life from their accounts, or to treat it as merely consequential, the derivative and fragmentary output of patterns, codes, structures or systems variously defined as genetic or cultural, natural or social. Born of nature, moulded by society, impelled by the promptings of genetic predisposition and guided by the precepts of transmitted culture, human beings are portrayed as creatures whose lives are expended in the fulfilment of capacities bestowed at the outset. (2011, 3)

Citing Geertz, Ingold gets to the fine point of his own quest: “as Clifford Geertz famously put it, ‘with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life,’ each of us is supposed to ‘end in the end having lived only one’” (Ingold 2011, 3, citing Geertz 1973, 45). Ingold, over the last couple of decades, has contested this drive towards closure, seeking

to reverse this emphasis: to replace the end-directed or teleonomic conception of the life-process with a recognition of life’s capacity continually to overtake the destinations that are thrown up in its course. It is of the essence of life that it does not begin here or end there, or connect a point of origin with a final destination, but rather that it keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents. Life, in short, is a movement of opening, not of closure. As such, it should lie at the very heart of anthropological concern. (2011, 3)

He argued that attention had been fixated on the wrong pieces of the puzzle.

Imagine a river, flowing along between banks on either side. Suppose that the banks of the river are connected by means of a road-bridge. We could then cross by road from a location on one side to a location on the other. Thus the bridge establishes a transitive connection between the two locations. But the river, running under the bridge in a direction orthogonal to the road, does not connect anything to anything else. Rather, it just flows, without beginning or end, scouring the banks on each side and picking up speed in the middle. (2011, 14; Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 28)

This image galvanized Ingold’s thinking. That bridge stands for what in life can be measured in terms of transitivity—the movement from a plan to the completion of a product. But the river is life itself, “the line of flight [which] to the contrary is intransitive: it carries on. We have in effect been concentrating on the banks while losing sight of the river” (2011, 14).

Ingold’s ethically “interested” anthropology, a departure from “business as usual” that did not go unnoticed (2011, xi), shifted the focus from human

products/artifacts to the process of being human. Some brief quotes identify the conceptual distance he has come to reach his current state of thinking about human life, as, I would suggest, they also indicate the sort of thinking needed to conceive of translation as something more than a product, more than an operation carried out on a text—as a meaningful and meaning-making human activity. Three of these quotes are crucial.

1. *Production.* Ingold began with a Marxian concept of humans as producers. “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production” (2011, 3; quoting Marx and Engels 1977, 42). While “production,” however, could easily be thought of in terms of goal or end-product, Ingold insisted that production be understood intransitively alongside of other intransitive verbs such as “to hope,” “to grow,” and “to dwell.” “Producers, both human and nonhuman, do not so much transform the world, impressing their preconceived designs upon the material substrate of nature, as play their part from within in the world’s transformation of itself. Growing into the world, the world grows in them” (2011, 6).

2. *Dwelling and Habitation.* Ingold took up next the concept of dwelling (the intransitive verb, more than the noun). Here he engaged with the thought of Heidegger who said, “The manner in which we humans are on the earth is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means . . . to dwell” (2011, 10–13; Heidegger 1971, 147). In focusing on human life as “dwelling” (the intransitive action), he created a conscious contrast with human life as measured mainly by the things humans build. Of course, humans do build things, but he sought to regard building as *working with* materials (weaving as an activity in which creative design emerges from human interaction), as opposed to a “doing to” materials, “bringing form into being rather than merely translating from the virtual to the actual” (2011, 10).

“Dwelling,” however, can too easily become a stationary notion, and indeed Heidegger insisted that dwelling was fundamentally an “emplacement”: Ingold thus shifted metaphors to “habitation,” another intransitive activity. Pulling together the key concepts and his reactions to the currents of thought, he refined his terms: “the essence of what it means to dwell . . . is, literally to be embarked upon a movement along a way of life. The perceiver-producer is thus a wayfarer, and the mode of production is itself a trail blazed or a path followed. Along such paths, lives are lived, skills developed, observations made and understandings grown” (2011, 12).

Ingold stressed the primacy of movement, wayfaring as “the fundamental mode by which living beings inhabit the earth. Every such being has, accordingly, to be imagined as the line of its own movement or—more realistically—as a bundle of lines” (2011, 12–13). Ingold had engaged Deleuze.

3. *Lines*. The following quote from Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* is programmatic:

For we are made of lines. We are not only referring to lines of writing. Lines of writing conjugate with other lines, life lines, lines of luck or misfortune, lines productive of the variation of the line of writing itself, lines that are between the lines of writing. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 194)

Deleuze is known as a philosopher of difference who imagined life in terms of “becoming,” as opposed to “being” (1968). He urged that the distinction be made between “being” (on which Western philosophy had got stuck) and “becoming,” the meaning of human existence understood in terms of movement, development, change, and diversity—indeed, in terms of process (becoming, building, creating, translating, openness) as opposed to product (being, house, artifact, translated text, closure). Human life is movement, and it is complex, a meshwork-process, in which the full meaning of life cannot be calculated on the basis of products, but must include process, as the means by which ends are achieved and, indeed, by which their meaningfulness can be grasped. Taking up such thought himself, Ingold had found an ally in this business of opening up thinking about human life.

But a summary of Ingold's reflection on the work of Bruno Latour also belongs here. Latour contributes the notion of “hybridity” to descriptions of the social and cultural reality, demonstrating how utterly interconnected human life is—politics, science, ethics, environment, weather; literally everything (1993; Latour is clear about his indebtedness to Serres 1982; 1991; and Deleuze 1968; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). He adopted the concept of the network (actor–network theory) to describe human life as an open system of nodes (of interest, power, necessity) connected by lines. The networks are not stable or fixed, never completed, but are always in movement, under construction, leaving the social always in a mode of becoming. Reality is defined not by the parts, or the nodes, but by the movement of relating to one another (Latour 1993; 2005). But even Latour was not entirely happy with the “network” metaphor, which in translation from the French (*réseau* = network, netting, or mesh), acquired a sort of rigidity not intended (1999, 15ff.). Ingold shifted to the notion of “meshwork” (borrowed from Lefebvre 1991, 117–18; Ingold 2011, 84), the image of woven fabric. In this shift, he stressed “the importance of distinguishing the network as a set of interconnected points from the meshwork as an interweaving of lines” (2011, 64). But both Latour and Ingold, with differing nuances, depict the social in close correspondence with the Deleuzian conception of “lines” in rhizomatic complexity.

Deleuze, Latour, and Ingold offer a series of metaphors trying to get a fix on something elemental about life: the rhizome (*haecceity*), the flowing river, the network, the meshwork, the spider's web. They picture life as becoming, as creativity in movement, as opposed to static, closed definitions. But in all of this open movement, what of coherence?

A Storied World. Deleuze has his detractors (Badiou 2000; Johnston 2008, xiii; but see also Crockett 2013). He is caricatured by some as conceiving of human (and nonhuman) existence as random, unpredictable, and perhaps even as having very little point. But his program may be read, as Ingold did, as seeking the opposite—to establish that human life is meaningful because it consists of a multiplicity of “points” and possibilities and openings. Then, the question becomes: How in this unruly openness and difference can there be “meaning in life”? Ingold's answer comes in part in his contention that life as movement, wayfaring, meshwork, complexity, and “becoming” can be meaningful because it is experienced as an unfolding within a story (2011, 156–75). “To know someone or something is to know their story, and to be able to join that story to one's own” (2011, 160–61).

Much has been written on the subject of narrative, story, and identity. Social psychologists in the last decades of the twentieth century began to speak in terms of “storied” identities (Sarbin coined the term “storied lives”; 1986). It is suggested that individuals construct continuous, ever-changing stories to produce coherent narratives of self. Many social psychologists argue that our lives only achieve meaning as stories—life histories, personal narratives, and autobiographies (Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992; Freeman 1993). This has led to a focus on the nature of memory, and the way in which dominant narratives inform personal life stories. This approach also draws attention to the distinction between social identity and personal identity.

In fact, Deleuze drew a distinction between long-term memory, which is stored and organized in narrative (family, race, society, or civilization), and short-term memory (present thought), which jets about in rhizomatic fashion, connecting here and there in unpredictable, creative ways. They may be distinguished, but they cannot be disconnected: “Long-term memory . . . traces and translates [short-term memory], but what it translates continues to act in it, from a distance, offbeat, in an ‘untimely’ way, not instantaneously” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 15–16).

What of the translator and translation in this open and storied world? Michael Cronin has addressed this question.

It is a precondition of the practice of translation that the translator wanders. The translator wanders between languages, cultures, texts, bodies of knowledge. The

essential nomadism of the translator's condition demands a creative restlessness that drives the translator's curiosity and enhances their ability. (Cronin 2017, 28)

And as the translator moves and translates in the open world, she makes personal meaning and derives and defines purpose from translating (17): "As the translator is transformed by his translation, so, too, is the world that surrounds him and survives him" (52). Wandering, nomadic, creative, restless, curious, the translator is engaged in a life-activity capable of giving meaning and purpose even as (especially as, and not just after) translation is underway, and transformed by the activity along the way. This is an angle on translation that is often dismissed when the translated object is made to predominate.

Interlude

Perhaps a swerve of relevance would be timely. Life, described by Ingold, Latour, Deleuze (et al.) as a "becoming," is equally present in the biblical writings (Phil 3.12; Gal 3.19; Heb 12; etc.) and, I would argue, equally in opposition to static notions of "being" (or indeed "product"). The life of faith is depicted as life in movement towards an open future. It is an "already/but not yet" experience of something which has begun with the *immanenting* of God in the world (whether in the burning bush, the Shekinah, or Jesus Christ) and goes along, involving the people of faith in a life-mission that might be similarly understood as *immanenting* and mobile. A life so understood is—to expand the concept—a life of ongoing "translation" required by the movement that is life (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 16; Latour 1987, 108, 208–9; 2005, 64–65). This convergence with the biblical narrative also compels us, then, to "think" translation from the other side—in terms of process (movement and opening), instead of product (stasis and closure)—translation as an intransitive activity proper to human existence whose meaning as human activity unfolds in story.

B. The translation "laboratory"—where life is kept open

Translation as process is a meaning-rich activity. An important building block of Latour's thought came from his observation of the life lived and the work done in the scientific laboratory. This was a piece of anthropological research. He posited a disconnect between what scientists think they are doing and what they are actually doing. They think and proclaim that they are carrying out research designed to discover and, through testing, verify the facts of nature. What they are actually doing is "producing" the facts.

They think and claim that scientific facts are uncovered or brought to light, but the laboratory is a place of production and induction, as much as (or more than) deduction. This process includes representing the lab work in scientific writings; the facts the scientists produce are in this way recognized and vouched for by the scientific community of witnesses. Scientists view themselves as scrupulous representatives of “the facts.” So, Latour asks, who is really speaking when “the facts” speak? They respond, “The facts themselves” (1993, 28). But they fail to see, or ignore, the role of human agency in this “communication,” for the facts are mute. Nature may be a sort of reality “out there,” but the meaning of it is a constructed meaning, mediated and formed through the scientific process and articulated in human language.

The point is that the scientific laboratory is not simply a place of discovery of facts about nature, facts that exist “out there”; it is a place in which facts are manufactured, purified through translation of the data. Latour means this conclusion to bring some clarity into the scientific process, clarity that distinguishes between what scientists think they are doing and what they are really doing. But before dismissing him as just another postmodern dreamer (he would reject both these terms), we must bear in mind the crucial distinction between him and his contemporaries, the sociologists of knowledge who railed against him: for Latour, the facts constructed in the laboratory are indeed “facts,” proven so through the multiple means of testing, a process that extends to the academic guild of science through publication. It is the rigor of the methodology that allows “science” to introduce into the discourse “facts” on the basis of their endurance. What emerges in his model is the reality both of these things called “facts” and equally (and this must not be missed) of the role of human beings in their “production.”

There is more to “the laboratory.” Latour demonstrates that the laboratory is a hybrid, complex space. It consists of technology, trained people, research protocols, and the stuff under examination. But it is also a space of objects, some technical, some mundane: test tubes and equipment necessary for the experiment, accepted theory, but also tables, chairs, floor, lighting, computers, paperclips, water coolers, and people. And all come into play when scientists create facts and send them out into the world as facts. They may think they are engaged in objective observation, that the facts already out there simply need to be ascertained. In reality, the verb “to experiment” is intransitive, descriptive of a manner of living. The “facts” that scientists choose to support are lived facts, not purely objective outcomes of a careful application of the scientific process.

Is Latour’s “laboratory” model flexible enough to apply to Bible translation? Can we think of the translation project as a “laboratory”? It too is

hybrid, complex, with many things contributing to the work that translation teams-in-community do and to the results. Viewed from the “other side,” the side of process, in translating, translators are engaged in a mode of life, of becoming. They manufacture meaning (not out of thin air) by the rigorous application of method—a transitive statement. However, the statement “he/she translates” is an intransitive statement about an activity of life. It is as much about *producing* as it is about *product*. Unlike machine translation, which is transitive, insensible, meaningful only on the basis of a product, translation as a mode of life understands the translator as creatively opening life-paths formerly inaccessible (in a foreign language), enriching human possibilities of life, movement, and becoming. The ancient text is mute until translators (and the communities which share in their work) give it voice and shape it to speak its fresh possibilities to an audience.

As in the scientific laboratory, the translation laboratory is a space of discovery and construction, but also of limitations. Methodologies are applied, tools are used, and meanings are tested, and when approved can be understood as having been “made.” But just as scientists cannot separate themselves from their presuppositions and must work within the limitations of their tools and methods, so too translators cannot separate themselves from an orientation to the story of the ancient text, their theologies, theories about translation, churches, and communities in which they live. Nor should they. If translation is viewed as life process, then this hybrid context is a constructive life environment, the place of creative translation that relates to real life.

Benjamin’s notion of translation as the guarantee of a source text’s after-life rested on the belief in the possibility of a pure communication, which no single human language could achieve, but which translation nevertheless pointed to—a degree of communication in which human misunderstandings might be resolved and unity might be forged. Translation as imagined above, with the accent on process, shares some of that dream. As life process, translation is:

- narrational work, an entering into and wayfaring in story;
- intransitive work, whose value is realized in the *doing* as much as in the *done*;
- a creating and revealing in movement in the meshwork of human life;
- a living with the text whose story “becomes” in flesh and blood along the tangled lines of human relations;
- done by and for human beings who live their storied lives together.

Translation viewed from the other side might look something like this.

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