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TRANSLATION AS COMMENTARY ON THE TRANSLATORS' IDEOLOGY

§ Introduction

Throughout the history of the Bible in the West, commentary has been a readily available resource for the theological student,¹ but for most present day readers the text alone suffices as the starting point for study, not least from the practical point of view of time and access. For many centuries single translations of the Bible into English dominated, either because they were the most popular, as the Geneva Bible was, or because they were the officially recognised Bible as in the case of the King James' Bible (see McGrath, 2001:161 and Daniell, 2003:291). The modern reader, however, has many translations available for comparison, historical and contemporary, paper and electronic. This article intends to illustrate how comparative analysis of translations of the Bible into English may reveal embedded commentary, not necessarily the detailed exegetical commentary to be found in the volumes of works such as *The International Critical Commentary* (1910-1991), but nevertheless a reflection of the ideology or way of thinking of the translator or translating group.

Ideology describes the ideas or conduct of a class or group of people and is regarded by them as justifying their behaviour (see OED 1989: 622). In the realm of Bible translation, religious ideology has naturally played a large part and was the impetus before and during the Reformation for first translating into the vernacular (Deansley, 1921, Lohse, 1986). The ideology of the translating group was usually demonstrated in the accompanying prefaces and commentaries. Current practice for the delivery of Bible translations has changed, so that most texts prepared for the general public as opposed to scholars come with limited commentary (for example the Good News Bible, 1989, or the New International Version 1973 New Testament, 1978 complete version.). In the relatively young discipline of Translation Studies² it has long been acknowledged that group or individual ideology may exert a considerable influence on the translator (see Lefevere, 1992, Hermans, 1985). There is also the issue of institutional influence and control. As

¹ See for example the catalogue of the British library or the Amazon.com website for the number and variety of commentaries available.

² James Holmes inaugurated the modern discipline with his seminal lecture "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" printed in Venuti 2000: 193

André Lefevere points out (Lefevere, 1992:19), translation and patronage have close ties. Bible translation includes a certain amount of institutional control not experienced to the same extent by other areas of translation.³ One could argue that institutional control, once evident in the accompanying textual commentary, remains today in the strategies used in translation. By using translation theories and comparative analysis it is possible to identify what might be considered the effects of ideology on translation practice.

Bible translation from Latin and Greek into the vernacular languages must plead special conditions in terms of translation and commentary, emerging as it does from a political and ideological struggle that began in the pre-Reformation era, continued throughout the religious upheaval in Europe in 14th and 15th centuries and continues in some measure today in the discussions about which translation of the Bible is the most authentic. Each denomination looks for a translation that best reflects its own interpretation of the content of the text.

In the early days of Christianity when Biblical scholarship was in its infancy, one of the impediments to translation was the struggle to interpret the divine mysteries of the source text (see Aelfric, 1881:4) and the dangers of misinterpretation made even well versed theologians unwilling to attempt translation. Later, during the Reformation, when factions with differing perspectives had sprung up, theological interpretation of the text took precedence in translation strategy. The function of translation was to reflect the interpretation of the translators so that the Catholic Rheims New Testament of 1582 was a response to the Bishop's Bible and the Calvinist Geneva version (H.W. Robinson, 1940, 190) and the King James Bible of 1611 was an effort to impose religious unity on a disparate public.

Interestingly, a considerable part of the impetus for the study of translation as a discrete discipline arose from the needs of the early Bible translators and continues as a commentary on the experiences of contemporary translators. Jerome wrote a robust defence of the methods he used when translating, or as he insisted, editing, the Latin Vulgate in the fourth century (See D. Robinson, 2002:23). Augustine, Jerome's contemporary and correspondent, went into some detail about semiotics and the interpretation of signs in the Bible (*ibid.* 30) and the major translations before and during

³ The Vatican issued translation guidelines in the document *Liturgiam Authenticam* section II available online at www.vatican.va

the Reformation all had prefaces explaining and defending translation strategy (Pollard, 1903: 194, Rhodes and Lupas, 1997).

In the modern age, the combined Bible societies began supporting and promoting inter-denominational linguistic and cultural research into translation studies in the twentieth century and continue to do so in the twenty-first. Eugene Nida's 1964 work *Toward a Science of Translating* and Ernst-August Gutt's *Translation and Relevance* of 1991 are just two early examples of a long and continuing list of products of the combined Bible societies' investment in scholarship and academic argument. Needless to say, some of the more extreme religious groups such the movement against the New King James Bible or David Cloud's fundamental Baptist Ministry maintain approaches somewhat less impartial and academic which are reflected in the tenor of their websites and the titles of their publications.⁴

Comparison of translations and analysis of translation strategy may uncover underlying commentary or reveal the translators' ideology or both. Modern technology has provided the practical means for just such a comparison in the form of websites for example, among many others, the Bible Gateway site, the International Bible Society Website, Lexilogos.com, and the Bible Database.⁵ Students of the Bible have access on these sites to a wide range of translations in English and other languages and may easily compare one version with another. Some websites offer advice about how to choose a suitable translation and even promote awareness of different translation strategies. The International Bible society website (www.ibs.org) has a chart tracing the range of translations and ranking them from the more literal or word for word, through those with more of a sense for sense or thought for thought strategy to those whose objective is to explain rather than reproduce the content, in other words, those verging on or employing paraphrase.

One of the main advantages for academic study of the history of Bible translation lies in the fact that the diachronic versions provide language samples from various times of the same source text, allowing linguistic historians to trace changes in language (Crystal, 2005:274 & 516, Blake, 1992:9). The modern synchronic translated versions supply an

⁴See David Cloud's site at <http://www.wayoflife.org/> accessed 09 03 07. See also Terry Watkin's site at <http://www.av1611.org/nkjv.html> accessed 09 03 07. A book by James White in 1996 called *The King James Only Controversy: can you trust the modern translations?* provoked a good deal of polemic as does the *Jesus is Lord* website at <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/>

⁵ See bibliography at the end of the article for relevant links

unrivalled corpus of comparative possibilities unavailable in most other texts. This article is an attempt to use the comparative resource available in order to detect implicit and explicit commentary. Taking into account the historical context of the translations, their intended *skopos* and the translation strategies employed, we may discover implicit commentaries embedded in the translation or explicit ones included in the body of the text. Even the layout of the text itself and the way certain words are foregrounded may give clues as to the ideology of the translator or translating group, since these aspects of the text imply a particular way of reading or interpreting the text.

1.1 Biblical translations and commentaries

Historically there have always been translations of parts of the Bible by individuals on a very limited local or personal basis, but after the commissioned Latin Vulgate version was completed by Jerome in the 4th century there were no subsequent complete translations, official or unofficial, in any vernacular language, for several centuries. Jerome's version, although itself a composite of several sources, was the common text used exclusively by commentators and theologians in the small world of the educated elite until Desiderus Erasmus reclaimed the Greek codices in the early 16th century and made them available for general use (Tracey, 1996:75). Comparing the Greek texts with the Latin Vulgate revealed how corrupt the latter had become through scribal errors and stimulated interest in the processes of translation and retranslation. The Vulgate had formerly been considered as the sole source text: the availability of the Greek text as comparison improved the possibilities for what was considered a more accurate translation. The Reformation in Europe sustained the Humanist interest in biblical philology while at the same time allowing for the revision of interpretations. The movement during the Reformation was to promote vernacular Bibles as an alternative way of revealing the truths of Christianity without the mediation of clergy. This development was in itself an ideological stance against the interpretation of the established church. Translation further facilitated interpretation and was used as a means of asserting or repressing an ideological stance.⁶

Commentary had previously provided interpretational space and continued to do so as long as the fear of heresy or distortion of the text through translation figured largely in the

⁶ Book III of Thomas More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* illustrates this point. It is devoted to the translation strategy of William Tyndale and gives specific examples of what More perceives as Tyndale's heresy through translation.

minds of the text providers. The tradition of written biblical commentary remains strong but commentaries are not normally attached to the text in the way that they were in earlier times. Sermons were also a major source of oral and written commentary on sections of Scripture and those who attend church services today continue to receive what amounts to an oral version of commentary on a biblical text on a regular basis.

Almost every major patristic figure of the early Christian church wrote commentaries on the Scriptures and the tradition has persisted throughout the 2000 year history of Christianity so far. Commentary was often used by theological students in preference to the text itself. Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), doctor at the Sorbonne in 1309, was among the early exegetes and wrote a most influential commentary advocating the precedence of the literal meaning in opposition to the complex fourfold exegesis promoted by contemporaries. The reviser of the first Wycliffite translation, which we shall look at in more detail further on, acknowledges his debt to Lyra and to others in the preface to the second Wycliffite version; Martin Luther drew on Lyra but wrote commentary of his own also; John Calvin's and all the Geneva Bibles were produced with their own extensive textual notes and accompanying commentaries that made use of previous writers. James I's dislike of the Calvinist commentary of the English Geneva Bible was one of the reasons why he promoted the 1611 King James version (Opfel, 1982:139, McGrath, 2001:141).

The tradition of accompanying exegetical notes was of paramount importance to the diffusion of the vernacular Bible. Text was embedded in commentary to such an extent that a printed page would consist of a small square in the centre in which was confined the words of the Bible, surrounded by the considerably larger amount of exegesis. One simple sentence could be accompanied by several sentences of commentary. In the Geneva Study Bible of 1599 for example, the opening sentence of the gospel of St. John has six accompanying comments:

1:1 In 1 the a beginning b was c the Word, and the Word was d with God, and the e Word was God.

(1) The Son of God is of one and the selfsame eternity or everlastingness, and of one and the selfsame essence or nature with the Father.

(a) From the beginning, as the evangelist says in (1 John 1: 1); it is as though he said that the Word did not begin to have his being when God began to make all that was made: for the Word was even then when all things that were made began to be made, and therefore he was before the beginning of all things.

(b) Had his being.

(c) This word “the” points out to us a peculiar and choice thing above all others, and puts a difference between this “Word”, which is the Son of God, and the laws of God, which are also called the word of God.

(d) This word “with” points out that there is a distinction of persons here.

(e) This word “Word” is the first in order in the sentence, and is the subject of the sentence, and this word “God” is the latter in order, and is the predicate of the sentence. (1599 Geneva Study Bible, John 1:1)

This kind of layout highlights the commentary rather than the translation by virtue of the volume of the former compared with the latter. In England as in other European countries, the tradition of commentary in translation or commentary as translation was not restricted to the Bible. John Trevisa’s translation of Higden’s *Polychronicon* is punctuated with comments from the translator (see Higden, 1896). Geoffrey Chaucer’s translation of the *Philosophae Consolatione* of Boethius contains bracketed explanations of the meaning of the original or comments from the translator often prefixed with the phrase « That is to seyn... » (see Benson, 1987:397-472). Both translators focus on the target reader and try to make clearer the content of the translated source text by their asides, but both are careful to mark the difference between the text and their own comments.

The use of commentary as an aid to understanding or as a defence of translation strategy has diminished considerably in the modern age. Compared with the extensive prefaces and commentaries of the Wycliffite versions, the Geneva Bible or the King James version both translator and commentator are currently far less in evidence. More often than not, the translation itself is explicit enough to provide understanding and stands alone as a piece of text, but worryingly retains few markers of the fact that it is a translation. The following analysis will focus on evidence of commentary within the text exposed by textual comparison.

1.2. Methodology

Looking through the material collected for this study⁷ it appeared that there were several types of what might be called commentary implicit in the samples. The first was commentary through correcting and editing. Just as a tutor’s comments on a student’s work could be described as a commentary on it, so the stages of translation progress from rough draft to final production through a process which can be described as self commentary. The choices or alterations made result from an unwritten dialogue with the source text which, if committed to paper, would present as a kind of commentary. It is not often that the reader

⁷ Please see bibliography for details of material selected

has access to the stages in translation; consequently the editing process can only be analysed when a revision or new edition appears. The first and second Wycliffite versions of the 1380s provide a good example of this type of commentary as they followed closely on one another.

The next type, probably the largest category, was a more direct commentary in the form of interpretation or intervention in the text. I have already mentioned how Chaucer and Trevisa separated their translation commentary from the body of the text. Comparative analysis of some modern samples of Bible translation reveals that interpretation or explanation embedded within the body of the text is often presented as part of the text. By expanding the notion of translation to include the process of transposing from oral narrative to written, we can also see evidence of the intervention of the original writer or narrator by means of commentary.

Translation is often a process that reveals attitudes and ideologies and some of the strategies of translation, conceived with one particular *skopos*⁸ or purpose in mind, may turn out to have a completely different effect from that proposed. We will make this type of commentary our third category, interesting as it is for the fact that it may be entirely unconsciously done on the part of the translator but nevertheless makes a valid contribution to the overall discussion on commentary.

The final category is a little less obvious as it involves comparison between languages. It occurs when linguistic tension causes the translator to react towards the content in a way that reveals concern for the correct interpretation of the material. It may arise from concern for gender neutral language or inclusive language, or simply because the rules of syntax in the target language create difficulties of interpretation. The resulting departure from standard language may be interpreted as commentary.

These categories will be examined one by one to discover what is highlighted when various samples are compared.

1.3. Correcting and Editing as Commentary

In order to illustrate the close connection between understanding and translation and between translation and commentary, and to demonstrate the first type of commentary through correcting and editing, a very early translation of the Bible into English will be used. In the 1390s when, under the influence of John Wyclif, a pre-reformation group of

⁸ *Skopos* theory was first proposed by Hans Vermeer in his paper "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action" available in L. Venuti (ed) 2000 *The Translation Studies Reader* London, Routledge pp 221-32

his followers made a complete translation of the Bible into Middle English, their source text was the Vulgate. The collected work of the individual translators underwent a substantial revision by a single person very soon after completion and it is this revision that provides the commentary on the earlier version. The text is John 10: 11-13.

Early version c1382:

I am a good shepherd. A good shepherd giveth **his soul** for his sheep. Forsooth a **merchant**, and that is not the shepherd, whose the sheep be not his own, seeth a wolf cometh and he levethe the sheep and fleeth

Later version c1383 ⁹

I am a good shepherd. A good shepherd giveth **his life** for his sheep. But an **hired hyne**, and that is not the shepherd, whose been not the sheep his own, seeth a wolf coming and he levethe the sheep and fleeth

(Hudson, 1978: 58 with spelling modernised, my emphasis)

Of particular interest in the Wycliffite revision is the process of negotiation specifically between “soul” and “life” and “merchant” and “hyred hyne”. The problem arises from the Latin source text. The Latin word *anima* encompasses “life” and “soul” as well as “spirit” and “mind”. Reading the whole passage and not just the section quoted makes the interpretation clearer, so that although “soul” is a legitimate rendering of “anima”, the reviser, thinking more broadly and not simply in terms of the sentence in hand, substitutes “life” in order to complete the sense. His correction amounts to a comment and a commentary on the original translation, the function of which is to elucidate the translation. Equally, the use of “merchant” in the first version is corrected simply because it is a mistake. *Mercenarius*, the Latin word for “hired man” or “mercenary” has been confused with the word *mercator* meaning “merchant”. To the modern reader familiar with the text the mistake is obvious, but in the first days of vernacular translation the error would not have been evident.¹⁰ The reviser presumably considered the other clues in the text “whose the sheep be not his own”, for example, or perhaps noticed the mistake when checking against the Latin. His correction is part of an attempt to elucidate the meaning of

⁹ The later version is thought by some to have been revised by one John Purvey, a close follower of Wyclif. Others have put forward a case for John Trevisa’s involvement. It is generally agreed that the work is done by one person, unlike the early version which has a variety of translators.

¹⁰ It must also be mentioned that the English language was at the end of the fourteenth century in a state of instability as regards vocabulary and syntax, so that some of the minor revisions in spelling or word order may have been simply a case of modernising or upgrading the language.

the source text, to improve the understanding of a translation that, in its initial raw state, did not achieve the objective of communication to its audience.

Also evident in this translation is the underplaying of the idea of Christ as shepherd, a theme which has come to be of considerable exegetical importance. As we have established, the Wycliffite source text was the Latin Vulgate version and consequently gave no clues to the translator as to definite or indefinite articles (as the Greek codices do). However, the availability of Greek codices and the theological development of the shepherd theme paralleling Christ with David the shepherd king are revealed in translations completed after the Greek texts became available in 1516. "A good shepherd" becomes "**the** good shepherd" or even "**The Good Shepherd**" (with capitals) in both Reformation translations such as the 1611 King James version or in the modern day *Amplified Bible* or *The Message* whose translators had access to the Greek and the benefit of later commentaries. The layout of the text suggests the way in which the content should be interpreted. The exegetical development of the idea is reflected in the language and presentation of these later translations which, when compared with the earlier ones, provide implicit commentary on them.

1.4. Embedded commentary

For the first example of embedded commentary, interpretation or intervention in the text, we will consider Mark the Evangelist in his role of translator of oral narrative into written text. The idea of the translator as creative writer is not new (Bassnett & Bush, 2006), nor is the idea of the translator as a rewriter of text (Lefevere, 1992). Louis Kelly (1979:1) comments that the first Christian translators were the Gospel writers who put into writing what had previously circulated by word of mouth. Mark was not particularly proficient in the Greek language in which he wrote his gospel: the *skopos*, or purpose of the translation, was to spread the stories of Christ to the non-Jewish Greek speaking inhabitants of the area. Writing for non Jews made the evangelist aware of the problems of cultural transfer where customs and ritual were concerned. In Mark 7 for example, verses 3 and 4 are explanations of Jewish customs for the information of the reader:

1. The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and
2. saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed.
3. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.
4. When they come from the marketplace they do not

eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

The version quoted is the *New International Version* of the New Testament (1973), which, in common with most other contemporary versions, brackets the commentary. The brackets make a considerable difference to the status of the aside by removing it from the main body of the text, acknowledging its function as explanation but omitting to make clear whose is the intervention, the original writer's, the translator's or the current editor's. Interestingly the King James Version does not bracket the original writer's comment.

Mark's intended audience also had a problem with the source language in which the events took place. Reported dialogues may lose impetus or nuance or both in translation where the target vocabulary lacks the dynamism embedded in the source language phrasing. Consequently when Mark translates from Aramaic, in the story of Jairus's daughter, he feels it necessary to reinforce the language. In the *New International Version*, Mark 5: 41 reads:

He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha koum!' (which means, 'Little girl, **I say to you**, get up!')

The brackets again make the intervention ambiguous, but there is also another issue. As Jerome points out in his *Letter to Pammachius on the Best Method of Translating*, Mark's translation of this phrase is not exact. The phrase *I say to you* has been inserted, as Jerome believes, for emphasis and "to convey the impression of one calling" (quoted in D. Robinson, 2002: 26).

In this example, Mark's role as narrator and translator involves him not only in general explanatory commentary but also in energising a particular translated phrase. He knows his audience will need the commentary to make the text clear to them and he also feels the need for some dynamic intervention in the translation of Christ's words. Interestingly, comparison of modern translations of Mark 5: 41 available online at the Bible Gateway site, reveals that only one of them, *The New Life Version*, omits the Aramaic:

He took the girl by the hand and said, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'

The 1996 version of *New Living Translation*, reduces the Aramaic words to a footnote and omits Mark's emphatic *I say to you* altogether, even in the footnote:

Holding her hand, he said to her, "Get up, little girl!"^[a]

[a] Greek text uses Aramaic '*Talitha cumi*' and then translates it as 'Get up, little girl'.

However, a later version of the same translation reinserts Mark's commentary but not the emphatic *I say to you*:

Holding her hand, he said to her, '*Talitha koum,*' which means 'Little girl, get up!'

The official *skopos* of the *New Living Translation* is to make the same impact in the life of its readers as the original had (New Living Translation Version information, Bible Gateway site) although how to ascertain the impact of the original two thousand years ago is something of a problem. The *skopos* is to be achieved by what is defined by the writers of the information as "thought for thought" translation, or what Jerome and Cicero defined as sense for sense rather than word for word (D. Robinson, 2002:25). There are several possible conclusions to be drawn here. Perhaps the omission highlights the intention to domesticate, or to simplify, or to minimise the markers of translation. It certainly reduces Mark's commentary to commentary instead of leaving it as an integral part of the text, but turns it into editorial comment rather than the comments of the writer. Authority shifts from the writer Mark to the editors or translators or both.

1.5. Translation and Ideology

From commentary embedded in narration we turn now to an example of how ideological commentary or the translator's attitude towards a particular issue may be embedded in the choice of vocabulary. Again, for this analysis, it will be necessary to consider the *skopos* of the translation as we will be using the *New International Version*, *The Message* and *The Amplified Bible*. To this end a short description of the translation strategies of each translating group will precede the example. The sample text is Paul's second Epistle to Timothy 3: 6-7. Paul is talking about the negative effect of false teachers whose teaching would lead to ungodliness. The Latin is concise and to the point:

6 ex his enim sunt qui **penetrant** domos, et captivas ducunt **mulierculas** oneratas peccatis, quæ ducuntur variis **desideriis**: 7 semper discentes, et numquam ad scientiam veritatis pervenientes. (Latin Vulgate)

The Greek interlinear version of the same passage requires asterisks to explain the grammar as English language lacks agreement of adjectives and does not foreground the fact that it is the women to whom the adjectives apply:

6. ἐκ τούτων γάρ εἰσιν οἱ ἐνδύοντες εἰς τὰς οἰκίας καὶ
 of these for are the ones creeping into - houses and
 αἰχμαλωτίζοντες γυναῖκάρια σεσωρευμένα* ἁμαρτίαις
 capturing silly women having been heaped with sins
 ἀγόμενα* ἐπιθυμίαις ποικίλαις
 being led by lusts various
7. πάντοτε μανθάνοντα* καὶ μηδέποτε εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας
 always learning and never to a full knowledge of truth
 ἔλθειν δυνάμενα*
 to come being able

* Agreeing with “silly women” (neut pl.).
 (Bagster and Sons, 1958: 840)

There are several interesting lines of investigation to follow in this extract, not least what happens to the words “penetrant” and “ἐνδύοντες” or the phrases “variis desideriiis” and “ἐπιθυμίαις ποικίλαις”, but let us focus our interest mainly on the translation of the words “muliercula” and “γυναῖκάρια”. “Muliercula” is defined in Lewis and Short’s *A Latin Dictionary* as “a little woman, mere woman, girl, common working girl” and the equivalent word in the Greek source text “γυναῖκάρια” as “little woman (wife) or weak woman”. The word in Latin and in Greek has connotations not easily expressed by a single word in the target language and is necessarily supported by adjectives in order to achieve the full sense. What is interesting is the choice of adjectives and their number.

The first example in English is from the *New International Version*, which was made by a group of over one hundred scholars working from the best available Greek Hebrew and Aramaic texts. The Bible gateway website explains:

The Committee held to certain goals for the NIV: that it be an Accurate, Beautiful, Clear, and Dignified translation suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing, and liturgical use. The translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God’s Word in written form. They agreed that faithful communication of the meaning of the original writers demands frequent modifications in sentence structure (resulting in a “thought-for-thought” translation) and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words (*New International Version* information: Bible Gateway).

Here is their rendering:

6 They are the kind who **worm their way** into homes and gain control over **weak willed women** who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of **evil**

desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. (New International Version)

The sense of “penetrant/ ἐνδύοντες” has been expressed in “worm their way”; the “Mulierculas/ γυναικάρια” appear as “weak-willed women” and the “variis desideriiis/ ἐπιθυμίαις ποικιλαις” as “evil desires”. This translation seems to embody a moderately restrained, sense for sense version of the source and reflects the writer Paul’s attitude towards women. We will use this model as our starting point and move on to our next sample.

The Message was translated by a single translator, Eugene Peterson, whose idea was to recreate the idioms and rhythms of the original language into English. The goal of *The Message*, as explained on the Bible Gateway website, is

to engage people in the reading process and help them understand what they read. This is not a study Bible, but rather ‘a reading Bible.’ The verse numbers, which are not in the original documents, have been left out of the print version to facilitate easy and enjoyable reading. The original books of the Bible were not written in formal language. *The Message* tries to recapture the Word in the words we use today. (*The Message* version information: Bible Gateway)

Here is Eugene Peterson’s rendering:

6 These are the kind of people who **smooth-talk themselves** into the homes of **unstable and needy women** and take advantage of them; women who, depressed by their sinfulness, take up with **every new religious fad that calls itself ‘truth.’** They get exploited every time and never really learn. (*The Message*)

We can see some movement between the first and second sample. “Worm their way” becomes “smooth talk themselves”, the “weak-willed women” have become “unstable and needy women” and the “evil desires” are expanded into “every new religious fad that calls itself truth”. In the translation of the last phrase there is opposition between the desire to elucidate and the need to preserve ambiguity. In his attempt to modernise and make the content relevant to the present times Peterson inserts what is not present in any of the sources. It is not only a question of modernising language but also of superimposing an example, that of “every new religious fad that calls itself truth” that he feels fits the context. He directs the interpretation of the passage. He implies that what is “new” cannot be “true”. Is he saying that only membership of the established religions leads to the truth? By specifying a particular situation he removes the possibility of other perhaps more spiritual interpretations. More importantly some of what is present in the source texts is

lost. The sentence “Always learning but never able to come to a full knowledge of the truth” is transformed into “they get exploited every time and never really learn”. Although Peterson’s version is a creative possibility, it is not marked as creative and is specific where the source text is general. It fits with the overall context of the verses and with Paul’s attitude and the attitude of the time towards women, but is essentially a personal interpretation.¹¹ Let us compare the final sample.

The *skopos* and strategy for *The Amplified Bible* is described on the website as follows:

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. (*The Amplified Bible* version information: Bible Gateway)

Here is the rendering from the *Amplified Bible*:

6 For among them are those who **worm their way** into homes and captivate **silly and weak-natured and spiritually dwarfed women**, loaded down with [the burden of their] sins [and easily] swayed and led away by **various evil desires and seductive impulses**. 7 [These weak women will listen to anybody who will teach them]; they are forever inquiring and getting information, but are never able to arrive at a recognition and knowledge of the Truth. (*The Amplified Bible*)

The first thing to be noticed is the fact that the first phrase we are using for comparison purposes, “worm their way” is translated in the same way as our first moderate example and very similarly to our second. This phrase surprisingly has no expansion or amplification. However, the phrase “weak-willed women” of the first sample, which becomes the “unstable and needy women” of the second, is extended into “silly and weak natured and spiritually dwarfed women”. The “evil desires” of the first sample, portrayed as “every new religious fad that calls itself truth” in the second, revert in the *Amplified Version* to “led away by various evil desires and seductive impulses.” The intention of the *Amplified Bible* is to give “multiple renderings” of the source text to allow the reader to understand what Scripture “really says” (*The Amplified Bible* version information: Bible

¹¹ There is an interesting discussion of this translation at: http://www.crossroad.to/Bible_studies/Message.html accessed 10.03.07

Gateway). Selective amplification foregrounds certain issues over others: amplification itself concentrates the negative implications of derogatory adjectives such as “evil” and “seductive”. It could be argued that “spiritually dwarfed” is a retrospective interpretation of the situation Paul is describing, not a translation of “mulierculas” or “γυναικάρια”. The negative emphasis of the passage is taken away from the false teachers and laid on the women who accept the teaching.

It is interesting that the same foundation responsible for the *Amplified Bible* also produced the *New American Standard Bible* and has a dual text *Amplified/NASB Bible* currently on sale. A dual text invites comparison between translations and in this format the *Amplified Bible* acts as a commentary for the NASB. However, presented alone, the *Amplified* version presents a much more forceful and emphatic text than the NASB. Presentation has some considerable bearing on the way a text is “read” and to some extent imposes a way of reading on the reader or encourages the reader to take a particular line of interpretation.

1.6. Linguistic Tension as an indicator of implicit commentary

The opening of the Gospel of St. John has long posed linguistic problems of interpretation and translation, not least because of the difficulty of translating the complexity of the Greek word ὁ λόγος. The word *logos* is masculine in Greek, neuter in the Latin rendering *verbum*, but may be rendered as a feminine noun in some gendered European languages (*palavra* in Portuguese, *palabra* in Spanish, *parole* in French, *parola* in Italian). If the word chosen is feminine, Portuguese, Spanish, French and Italian grammar requires the subsequent personal pronoun to be feminine. But a feminine pronoun referring to God or Christ may compromise the meaning of the passage. Syntactically speaking, the “Word” in English should be rendered by the neuter pronoun *it* but is invariably rendered *he* according to the interpretation of the passage.¹² By examining several translations of the opening of John’s Gospel, we can see that the linguistic tension caused by the necessary syntax produces a subtle commentary on the process of translation. Translators use various methods to extract the required interpretation from the source almost in spite of syntactical difficulties. This is better illustrated with examples.

¹² One could argue that the use of a capital letter here acts as a marker of recategorisation, but capitalisation has itself been imposed by a translator or editor, since in the early Greek codices the writing was all in capital letters and consequently there was no way of marking an individual word. The Wycliffite version has no capitals in this section.

The Latin (Vulgate) and Greek (Stephanus NT 1550) provide concise and, because of the gender of *logos* and *verbum*, unambiguous readings:

In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum
 ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος

Of the four French sample texts, the Louis Segond version, described as “the classic French equivalent of the English King James Version” (Louis Segond version information: The Bible Gateway 22.10.06) is happy to retain the necessary syntax. *La Bible du Semeur* is the International Bible Societies French Translation of 1999 and uses a neat grammatical trick to avoid the gender conflict. The version of J.N. Darby provides an alternative rendering and the *Nouveau Testament Illustré en Français Courant* solves the pronoun problem by repeating the noun at all times. Here is the *Louis Segond* translation:

Au commencement était **la Parole**, et **la Parole** était avec Dieu et **la Parole** était Dieu. **Elle** était au commencement avec Dieu. Toutes choses ont été faites par **elle** et rien de ce qui a été fait n’a été fait sans **elle**.

The version of J. N. Darby, a 19th century Anglo-Irish Bible teacher who produced translations in English, French and German and consequently would be very aware of grammatical implications, foregrounds the linguistic tensions by suggesting a masculine alternative, but once attention has been drawn to the fact, allows the grammar to take its natural course. Here is Darby’s version:

Au commencement était **la Parole (ou : le verbe)**; et **la Parole** était auprès de Dieu et **la Parole** était Dieu. **Elle (ou : il)** était au commencement auprès de Dieu. Toutes choses furent faites par **elle** et sans **elle** pas une seule chose ne fut faite de ce qui a été fait.

The next example is the *Nouveau Testament Illustré en Français Courant*, in which the use of the subject pronoun *elle* is avoided by employing the proper noun before each verb.

Avant que Dieu crée le monde, **la Parole** existait déjà; **la Parole** était avec Dieu et **la Parole** était Dieu. **La Parole** était donc avec Dieu au commencement. Dieu a fait toute chose par **elle**; rien de ce qui existe n’a été fait sans **elle**.

La Bible du Semeur copes differently:

Au commencement était **celui qui est la Parole** de Dieu. **Il** était avec Dieu, **il** était lui-même Dieu. Au commencement, **il** était avec Dieu. Tout a été créé par **lui**, rien de ce qui a été créé n’a été créé sans **lui**.

The translators betray by their strategies the fact that they are aware of the paradox presented by the syntax of this section and each employs a different solution. Interestingly the oldest version is the least changed, whereas the *Bible du Semeur* of 1999 affirms the masculinity of God by manipulating the language and adding emphasis through repetition of *au commencement*. In the 1990s gender issues were strongly debated and several new Bible translations tried to address the alienation caused by patriarchal language (see Gruden, 1995, Carson, 1998, Polythress & Gruden, 2000). During the same decade, the focus of translation studies turned towards the representation of gender in translation (Simon, 1996, von Flotow, 1997). Translators of the Bible during this time would necessarily confront the same issues, so publicly were they debated..

Conclusion

Translation presupposes both the understanding of the text in its spiritual and allegorical senses and the possibility of transfer of those elements to the target text. Because of the complexity of the source material some modern translations have a tendency to elucidate, to simplify, to interpret rather than present the text either literally as it is or in all its many other possible forms. The purpose of translation during the Reformation was initially to lay the Bible open for the general masses and remove it from the sole interpretive authority of the contemporary dominant institution. Keeping to the literal sense prevented accusations of distortion through translation. Once open to the people, however, the function of translation became the interpretation of the source in a particular way, supporting a particular interpretation or ideology. The availability of many translations allows for specific functions; a separate *skopos* for each translation but also a separate *skopos* for each translator or group of translators.

Revision, the first category investigated, is a natural dynamic process in translation strategy and may provide opportunity for improvement in the light of new scholarship, better understanding of the source text, or may simply be a necessary process owing to change in target text discourse. Embedded commentary, on the other hand, amounts to positive intervention on the part of the translator or editor; it is an attempt to open the text to the reader by providing information necessary for its interpretation. There is no particular attempt to persuade the reader of a particular point of view, only to provide what is necessary for the interpretation of the information. The third category, the investigation of the revelation of attitudes and ideologies, provides a demonstration of the translator's

attitude towards the source text, towards the protagonists in the source text or towards the reader. The question is whether this attitude is subconscious, unconscious or consciously held. It could be interpreted as an attempt to guide or influence the reader and is considerably different from simply providing information as an aside. Finally, the linguistic tension produced by translating some elements of the source text from one language to another highlights a process of fitting the translation into a presupposed interpretation of the source text. Rather than translating what is present linguistically, the translator feels impelled to translate what is present theologically, even if that means distorting the target text. Is this not a place for commentary rather than target text distortion?

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