

The Philosophy & Methodology of Translation as Gleaned from The Holy Bible

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Abstract

"The meaning of the original text, communicated through the form of that text, must be fully conveyed both by using natural structures of the receptor language and by mirroring the vocabulary and grammatical elements of the original language, neither rigidly reproducing the form of the original nor going beyond the stated meaning of the text to explanation, interpretation, or cultural adaptation."

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There are two general theories or methods of Bible translation. The first has been called "formal equivalence". According to this theory, the translator attempts to render each word of the original language into the receptor language and seeks to preserve the original word order and sentence structure as much as possible. The second has been called "dynamic equivalence or functioned equivalence". This translation theory aims to produce the closest natural equivalent of the message expressed by the original language text in the reception language both in meaning and style. Such a translation attempts to have the same impact on modern readers as the original had on its audience.

A dynamic translation can also be called 'a thought-for-thought' translation as contrasted with a formal equivalence or word-for-word translation. Of course, to translate the thought of the original language requires that the text be interpreted accurately and then be rendered in understandable idiom. Hence, the goal of any thought-for-thought translation is to be both reliable and highly readable.

To guard against personal biases and to ensure the accuracy of the message a thought for thought translation should be created by a group of scholars. Each scholar made a thorough review of the assigned book and submitted suggested revisions to the appropriate general reviewer.

A thought-for-thought translation prepared by a group of capable scholars has the potential to represent the intended meaning of the original text even more accurately than a word-for-word translation. This is illustrated by the Hebrew 'Hesed'. This term cannot be adequately translated by any single English word because it can connote love, mercy, grace, kindness, faithfulness and loyalty

Look at the various translations of the Bible from its original Hebrew text. In Kings 2:10 in the King James Version (KJV) and the new living translation "So David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David (KJV). "Then David rested with his father and was buried in the city of David" (NLT). Only the new living translation translates the real meaning of the Hebrew Idiom "Slept with his father", into correct contemporary English.

Instead of translating ancient weights and measures in Hebrew, which communicates little to the common reader in English, the translations expressed them in the vocabulary used by the common man. Instead of translating ancient currency values literally, the translators used the terms of weights in precious metals. For example, "three shekels of silver" in Hebrew might become "three silver coins" or "three pieces of silver".

Since the Hebrew Lunar Calendar fluctuates from year to year the solar calendar used today, the translators expressed them in a way that communicates with our modern readership. We cannot use the names of Hebrew months such as 'A lib' which are meaningless to the modern reader. Because the months of the Hebrew lunar calendar do not correspond with the months of our calendar. For ex: Ezra 7:9 pinpoints the date when Ezra arrived in Jerusalem "The first day of the fifth month". This was during the seventh year of King Artaxerxes reign (Ezra 7:7). The translation rendered the lunar date as August - 4th with a footnote giving the Hebrew and identifying the year as 408 BC.

Places identified by the term must be allowed in translation to communicate in an understandable form for example, the word 'city' is interrupted as 'towns' or 'villages' similarly the word 'mountain' is better rendered as 'Hill'.

Many words and Phrases in Hebrew and Greek need much explanation for ex: the phrase "they beat their breasts" (Luke 23:48) As "They went home in deep sorrow". Metaphorical language is often difficult for contemporary readers to understand. Forex: the ancient poet writers- your eyes are doves" (song of Songs 1:15). To help the modern reader, it has been converted as "Your eyes are soft like doves" Again the poet-writer, "Your neck is like the tower of David" (song of songs 4:4). They rendered it as "your neck in as stately as the tower of David".

In many places, the translators used plural pronouns (they, these) in place of the masculine singular (he, him). For ex: a traditional rendering of proverb 22:6 is "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it". They have rendered it as "Teach your children to choose the right path and when they are older, they will remain upon it". Again in Hebrew it is written as "He who digs a pit will fall into it", and "he who rolls a stone it will come back on him".

They have rendered it as “if you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself” If you roll a boulder down on others, it will roll back and crush you”.

In conclusion, I would say that any translation of the original text is subject to limitations and imperfections. It is almost impossible to make a perfect translation. To grasp the care of ancient Vedas and books, we need unusual insight and God’s guidance.

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