

Chapter 3

Meaning-Based Translation

3.1 Introduction

Bussmann defines translation as the process and results of using the source language text and re-telling its meaning as closely as possible in the target language (Bussmann 1996: 495). Larson has an expanded definition as “studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, and cultural context of the source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning, and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the receptor language and its cultural context” (Larson 1984: 3). It was Nida who formulated the “functional equivalence” approach and popularized it by using it as the underlying translation principle of the Today’s English Version Bible. Nida, in his early writings, used the term “dynamic equivalence”, and it was his focus to show that the goal of translation was to achieve equivalent impact in each language. But by realizing that there are other factors such as cultural background and situation which influence the reader’s response, the term “dynamic equivalence” was replaced by “functional equivalence”.

Other translators and linguists were influential in expanding Nida’s Bible translation approach with books and articles they wrote. While Beekman and Callow called this approach “idiomatic translation”, Barnwell, in her textbook which was designed to train mother-tongue translators in Africa, used the term “meaning-based translation”.

It should be noted that there are two kinds of equivalence: formal equivalence, and functional (meaning) equivalence. Formal equivalence emphasizes the linguistic forms and structures of the source language text, e.g., its grammatical forms. Functional equivalence emphasizes conveying the meaning of the original text, while having in mind that the forms can be different. This paper has used the latter approach to compare the translations.

3.2 General Principles

The qualities of a good meaning-based translation are: accuracy, clarity and naturalness. Each of these is discussed below.

3.2.1 Accuracy

There are two different ways of looking at accuracy. The first is in terms of language itself (Barnwell's view) and the second in terms of response of the receptors (Nida's view). These two are not in contrast with each other, but are compatible.

In regard to accuracy, Barnwell says that the meaning of the original message should be re-expressed "as exactly as possible" in the language into which the translator is translating into (Barnwell 1986: 23). In addition, she explains that if any changes, omissions, or additions occur to the meaning of the translation which makes it different in any way from the original message, then that translation is inaccurate (Barnwell 1986: 23).

Nida believes that accuracy should have the same meaning for the receptors of the translated text as it has for the receptors of the original message. Therefore, the understanding of the meaning and emotional reactions to the text should be the same as the receptors' of the original message. (Nida 1969: 201). He also believes that accuracy is "the first and central aim of the translation" (Nida 1997: 408)

Within the area of accuracy the following issues were found and labeled accordingly, the labels are mentioned in brackets. At times the meaning had changed (changed meaning); key terms had been translated inaccurately which caused a changed of meaning (key term, changed meaning); parts of the meanings were missing (omitted meaning); phrases were omitted (omission); the rendering expressed some of the meaning intended there, yet in a very narrow sense (sense too narrow); phrases or meanings were introduced to the text which did not exist in the original text (addition); and finally at times the punctuation was not accurate which caused the sentence either to be meaningless or have a different meaning (punctuation).

3.2.2 Clarity

Barnwell defines clarity as the translation being "clear and understandable", that is, the translation should communicate the message in an understandable way so that people can readily understand it (Barnwell 1986: 23).

In regard to Bible translation, one should realize that understanding some parts of the Bible is difficult because of its spiritual content. Also, at times, some background

knowledge and further teaching is needed to grasp the message fully. Therefore, clarity in translation does not mean only to simplify in order to make these parts understandable, sometimes clarity might actually involve making previously implicit information explicit. Yet the wording of the translation should not make the message difficult to understand. Also the language used in translation should make the message as clear as possible (Barnwell 1986: 24).

Translation should make sense, or in Nida's words, the translator should avoid "meaningless or totally obscure phrases" (Nida 1947: 20).

Within the area of clarity the following issues were found and labeled accordingly, the labels are mentioned in brackets. At times the logical relation between verses was incorrect (logical relations skewed); some renderings were vague or were ambiguous (ambiguity); the rendering expressed some of the meaning intended there, yet in a very broad sense (sense too general); and finally at times the meaning had changed due to lack of clarity (changed meaning).

3.2.3 Naturalness

About naturalness, Barnwell writes that a translation neither should sound foreign nor like a translation, but it should sound as if someone is speaking in a natural everyday way (Barnwell 1986: 24).

According to Nida the formal aspects of the language like word classes, grammatical categories, semantic classes, discourse types and cultural context, etc., are among the important aspects of the natural form of the receptor language (Nida 1964: 168). Because these formal aspects are not the same in the receptor and the source language, a translator should be careful not to carry over the formal aspects of the source language into the translation.

Within the area of naturalness the following issues were found and labeled accordingly, the labels are mentioned in brackets. At times the tenses of the verbs were not in agreement, the way they should be in Farsi, which resulted in being unnatural (tense); sometimes punctuation was not accurate which caused unnaturalness (punctuation); at times two words were used together, which in Farsi do not collocate correctly (collocational clash); the renderings were vague (ambiguity); at times the logical relation between verses were inappropriate (logical relations skewed); some renderings and words are foreign or are not used commonly anymore (outdated word); and finally at times, some renderings are repeated with very little change if at all (redundant).