On the historical epistemologies of Bible translating

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The three great monotheisms—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—are all religions based on sacred texts. Of the three, only Christianity has accorded sacred status to translations of its foundational texts. Indeed, one might argue that Christianity has been based on such translations, creating and depending on a multiplicity of texts ostensibly conveying the same message. The result has been two millennia of institutional survival, alongside significant sectarian and social fragmentation. Over the centuries, translation has been associated not just with unity, dissemination, and salvation, but also with dissent and conflict. For each deep-held belief in a unitary message, one could probably find a historical dispute about different renditions; faith in the one message has been experienced through countless adaptations to circumstance. Judaism and Islam, on the other hand, have retained significant social and theological unity by according translation a secondary place, useful for teaching purposes but never replacing the sacred text itself.

The way any translator comes to terms with the Christian Bible cannot escape that historical tradition. The Bible can be said to bring with it a complex epistemology, understood here as a mode of construing knowledge from a text (from the Greek *epistêmê*, knowledge). Even if a biblical fragment is linguistically like any other piece of language, even if the translator has no special faith concerning that text, the Bible is historically not just another piece of language, and translating it cannot be just another translation job. This is not necessarily because the text is sacred in itself (sacredness is not a fact of linguistic features) but because something about the text, or about some of its versions, has long been *thought* to be sacred, and by many different people (sacredness is a fact of historical reception). Over the centuries, the Bible has been the site of so much human effort, both for and against particular readings, that its status is necessarily special. It has gained a cultural weight, heavy with scholarship, revelation, mystery, elegance, cleverness, cunning, bigotry, blindness and persecution. And that accumulated weight, if nothing else, changes the way any translator approaches the text.

That complex epistemology is sometimes seen as a repressive tradition, stifling creative interpretations and doing little more than institutionalize ideological power. Here we shall nevertheless argue that epistemologies of inspiration are also part of the tradition, allowing some translators to access decision-making spaces beyond institutional control. This means that what happens while one translates (the epistemologies of production) has never been entirely subdued to the demands of institutions (the politics of authorization). The result is a rich and dynamic history.

The status of the source

George Steiner, in the final chapter of *After Babel*, describes the "hermeneutic motion" through which a translator might work. The first step in that motion is "initiative trust", glossed as "an investment of belief, underwritten by previous experience but

psychologically hazardous, in the meaningfulness, the 'seriousness' of the facing or, strictly speaking, adverse text" (1978: 296). In the case of the Bible, that initiative trust is significant and complex. For believers, it is trust in the status of the text as the Word of God. That much can be found in the prefaces to most contemporary translations, in declarations such as "...the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form" (*New International Version* 1984: vi). The text is held to be sacred. But which text, exactly? Such is the first of the many problems of initial trust.

At the establishment of the "original", as has long been known, is a multilingual collection of writings and rewritings collated over a period of centuries, some of them quiet fragmentary, many of them contradictory, and most requiring interpretation in terms of non-sacred texts from the same periods. A major continuing problem in this respect is the status of canonical and apocryphal texts, and the wavering border between the two categories. The exact limits of the sacred texts have changed with time and tradition. A further historical problem has been the philological variation in the manuscripts available to us, and thus the need to interpret the text within the original languages and cultures.

This is not just a transitory difficulty ensuing from relatively recent discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the early sixteenth century, the humanist scholar Erasmus altered the predominant view of the New Testament not by translating it as such, but by first establishing its Greek texts, which were then rendered into Latin as the *Novvm Instrumentum*. From the mid-eighteenth century, historical-critical methods were applied to further texts, for example in Jean Astruc's work on the sources of the Pentateuch. German scholars developed this approach as what became known as "higher criticism", to be distinguished from merely textual interpretations considered the ground for confessional and dogmatic readings. By asking questions about when texts were composed, from what sources, and by whom, a series of scholars applied secular critical methods to sacred texts. Johann Salomo Semler, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Ferdinand Christian Baur and Julius Wellhausen increasingly studied historical records from the Middle East in order to determine the relative authenticity of both canonical and non-canonical texts (see Krentz 1975, Rogerson 1985). The philosophical upshot can be seen in the works of the Tübingen scholars Friedrich Schleiermacher, David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, and in much of what has happened since then. Although the term "higher criticism" no longer has currency, its critical potential lives on in works like a recent controversial German translation that includes both New Testament and "early Christian writings" (see Berger and Nord 1999), presenting the reader with more philological material than most institutional readings feel comfortable with. The work of philological science still maintains its power to upset. It is part of any modernist epistemology.

With increasing philological and historical information, particularly in the twentieth century, our knowledge of the textual material at the source has grown to a point where it is decidedly problematic for most simple notions of the sacred. The New Testament is not only in varieties of Greek, in numerous manuscript traditions, but is in many places written on top of Hebrew variants, referring back to the previous alliance and incorporating names and word-games that presuppose knowledge of Hebrew. In a more than metaphorical sense, the source itself is already translational, generating knowledge from its internal differences, in a way that only increases with further philological discovery. Rather than reduce the text to unitary meanings, scholarship has thus tended to make the source grow. It accumulates notes and glosses, concordances and discordances, such that the text is a sum of readings and prior translations, even

before the translator begins to invest trust. The text is no longer a source as such, but a series of historical readings and renditions. That, too, is a part of many modernist epistemologies.

To what extent can initiative trust survive such challenges? There is a sense in which trust was possible, and still remains possible, through simple acceptance of what we find, regardless of its historical status. As is well known, Jerome claimed he translated the Bible word-for-word (and other texts sense-for-sense) because "there is mystery in the very order of the words" (Letter to Pammachius). That particular kind of trust might seem closer to the Judaic and Islamic epistemologies; it is perhaps of the kind that would have Ancient Hebrew or Classical Arabic recited to (and indeed by) those who do not understand the meaning of the words. The surface level of the text, the sounds and rhythms, the flow of discourse, would in itself be sacred, independently of any referential function or circumstances of production. The French poet and translator Henri Meschonnic claims this is precisely what should be translated in the case of the Hebrew Bible, which he sees as an essentially poetic text. Not to render the rhythm, says Meschonnic, is to impose the false division of the linguistic sign, separating form from meaning, the signifier from the signified (1973; 1999: 23). This division in turn "induces a schizophrenia of translating", as if one had to choose either the meaning or the form, as if a meaning could ever exist without form.

That schizophrenic division is by no means absent from the tradition of Bible translation. It has been resisted by essentially literary translators, including the Jewish translators Rosenzweig and Buber, Chouraqui, and indeed Meschonnic himself, all of whom pay careful homage to the surface forms of the Hebrew texts. For the non-literary majority of translators, however, fidelity to prosodic form has rarely been a question. Since trust can seldom be in the letter of eternally fixed Hebrew and Greek texts (given the existence of so many variants), and since trust has not traditionally been conceptualized in those terms anyway (as it has in Judaism and Islam), the translator's initiative moment has tended to concern faith in a *meaning* beyond form. The thing to be trusted is then the Word, capitalized as an idealism, sometimes evangelically called "the message", linguistically still known as "the meaning", more theologically dubbed the "spirit". If that message can somehow be separated from linguistic form (if the Word can be separated from the Hebrew or Greek), then it can be translated afresh each time, and the task of the translator is simplified considerably. Further, if the message can be separated from linguistic form, all translations may be equally valid, each adequate to its historical moment. The task of the translator is thus simplified with respect to initial trust, but vastly complicated in the moment of production. As target-language forms change, so must the translations. No translation will ever be definitive, and retranslation will be a never-ending process. Such would be a third element of some modernist epistemologies.

That much might seem a very contemporary doctrine, underlying theories of equivalence (Nida's, for example) and whole Bible-translating institutions (the work practices of the United Bible Societies and the Summer Institute of Linguistics could not operate without the idealist separation of message from form). Yet the separation has never been completely successful. In the Christian tradition, the use of biblical texts habitually succumbs to the ruse of form, most notably when some selected translations come to be treated as sacred in themselves. The first translation into a language is often (usually wrongly) revered as the most true, since its form acquires force of habit. On a grander historical scale, Jerome's version, the Latin Vulgate, has been particularly subject to veneration, inducing a centennial tradition of relative non-translation into the vernaculars. When churches chanted their sacred texts in Greek and Latin, in languages

the populace could not understand, the discourse retained the power and mystery of the poetic. The receivers could exercise no more than trust, specifically trust in someone else, the clergy, the exegetic bureaucracy, as textual mediators. Thanks to the epistemic division of message and form, the church could then expound the mysteries of unknown languages from the pulpit, speaking the vernaculars and patois that the people could indeed understand. In a sense, the sacred translations induced not exactly a tradition of non-translation (some versions are indeed authorized), but a tradition where the church reserves for itself the function and the power of translation, selecting and explaining texts to suit the moment. Initiative trust was thus effectively reserved for the initiates; a rather blinder level of trust was left to the rest. Not everyone could translate. That kind of social division would certainly seem more medieval than modernist or postmodernist. Yet its effects remain in the problematic of which translations obtain authorization, to which we shall return.

Once trust is assumed, Christian epistemology has negotiated two main problematics. The first is the *kind of meaning* available for translation. The second is the *authorization* of translations and retranslations.

The location of message

If a message can be separated from its linguistic form, it must exist in spheres other than language. In a linguistic age like ours, those alternative spaces are hard to admit. The forged science of structuralism, like the cold exactitudes of post-structuralism, would shun anything for which there is no inscription. Trust could only be a calculation based on language. History, however, shows trust being invested in several other sites.

Christian theology, largely following Paul, accords a fundamental role to the spirit, the movements of which would guarantee the conveyance of message. If one believes in a spirit capable of guiding one's actions, then that guidance can precede anything done with language. The translator is filled with the Spirit, which then guides and guarantees the rendition of the message as God's Word. There are at least two possible variants on this guidance.

Non-representational epistemologies

In one historical vision, the spirit would enable the translator to understand the message is some immediate, rapturous way, and the nature of that understanding would follow through to a similarly immediate kind of re-expression. The result is akin to "spirit channeling" (cf. Robinson 2001), the passing of a special power from person to person. Here one could refer to the millennial tradition of "speaking in tongues", of inspiration, of poetry, trance, music and sexuality as allowing glimpses of the divine. The message, in shamanistic tradition, may be no more than a moment of illumination, the presence of a spirit within the person. The role of texts (across the whole semiotic range) would be to allow that moment of spiritual transfer, rather than represents anything anterior to the moment of revelation itself.

Such non-representational epistemologies might nowadays seem far-fetched. Yet, as we have noted, history is replete with sacred words pronounced (chanted, sung, repeated) but not understood on the level of anything but form. Those words are commonly believed to *embody* a divine message, not just to represent one. That belief is no more far-fetched than the doctrine of transubstantiation, defined by the Fourth Latran Council in 1215. If the body of Christ can be transferred into a piece of bread, the message of God can be in any translation. Spirit-channeling only requires its properly

sacred mode of transfer (transubstantiation requires the Eucharist; the sacred translation requires the faith of both the translators and the receivers).

Non-representational meaning is not without its grand narratives. One of the earliest epistemologies of spirit channeling must be the legend of the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. This was ostensibly produced by seventy-two rabbis (six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel) who, working in groups of two and in isolated cells, produced translations that were all absolutely identical. Augustine, the fifth-century Bishop of Hippo, claimed that only divine inspiration could account for such miraculous agreement, not just at the moment of understanding but more miraculously in the redaction of the translation itself. Indeed, given the identity of all versions, one must conclude that the understanding and the translating were one and the same moment. For any other kind of translating, we would expect the translators to all give different versions, and to *disagree* between themselves, even when they can presume to have understood the same thing. If you have just two rabbis, so the saying goes, you will have three opinions, and the same might be said for translators in general. More theoretically, Quine's principle of the indeterminism of translation assumes that "one translator would reject another's translation" (1969: 96-97). In this case, however, agreement ostensibly overcame any linguistic indeterminism. Indeed, the process would not have been linguistic at all. The translation would owe more to the way in which the translators were divinely inspired while translating. Meaning flowed through them, thanks to their status as privileged mediators. Augustine thus further allowed, in *De doctrina christiana* (428) and *De civitate dei* (413-426), that the linguistic differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text were ultimately of little significance: "Even though something is found in Hebrew versions different to what they [the seventy-two] have set down, I think we should cede to the divine dispensation by which they worked […]. It may be that the Holy Spirit judged that they should translate in a manner befitting the people they addressed" (*De doctrina christiana* 50).

The focus of many non-representational epistemologies is not so much on texts as such, but on the translators, particularly their privileged position and their state of mind while translating. The American theorist Douglas Robinson (1991, 1996, 2001) points out that translating, like any creative endeavor, involves moments where time seems to stand still, work no longer involves effort, and the whole process simply feels right. That kind of experience, says Robinson, is not just of the mind, but of the whole body. There, indeed, an anterior spirit would seem to flow through the mediator, physically, and into the translation. That experience can be part of any translation task, from the most banal to the sublime. It is talked about more often with respect to literary translation, as in the metempsychosis by which spirit of dead authors would resolve the translator's doubts (as claimed by the early-seventeenth-century English translator George Chapman) or in cases like the mystical "Sortes Vergilianæ" that the twentieth-century translator W. F. Jackson Knight claimed to have used in his translation of the *Aeneid*.

If there is any consistent difference between the literary and the religious in this regard, it is probably with respect to the role of the individual as a privileged site of transfer. Bible translation, at least in the medieval and post-medieval tradition (and indeed in the case of the Septuagint), tends to mistrust the individual experience. The embodiment of message in the moment of reception is typically ritualized and collective, whereas Western literary metempsychosis would care far more about the individualistic relation between author and translator. Non-literary translators of sacred texts have mostly worked in teams selected in terms of shared submission. Luther stated that "a false Christian or a rabble-rouser cannot faithfully translate the Scriptures", and

as we have noted, in the preface to most contemporary versions of the Bible there is a passage saying that the translators were "united in their faith". For some, that faith would be enough for the translation to embody the message. Such would indeed be one of the justifications for Luther famously rendering Paul's "ex fide absque operibus" (Romans 3: 28) as "allein durch den Glauben" (through faith *alone*): for Luther and his tradition, people are rectified not by works, but by faith, and nothing but faith. Forget about the linguistic differences. If the translators have faith, the right translation will be found. Shamanistic tradition certainly had little to say in the cold Prussian blue of Wittenberg. But its workings were perhaps merely collectivized, bundled into the committees where most church translating has been embedded ever since: "We often spent a fortnight or three or four weeks seeking and questioning a single word" (Luther, *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen*, 1530).

Protestant tradition would not be alone in socializing the spirit-channeling position. If a text can be seen as embodying spirit in a non-representational mode, then the church itself, as the necessarily historical and institutional maintenance of the sacred text, can be approached in the same way. What epistemological difference should there be between one of Luther's committees and the whole extent of the historical church? We might thus see the thought of the late-nineteenth-century French theologian Alfred Loisy as an extreme but logical application of non-representational epistemology. Loisy opposed the position, represented by Harnack, that the message of the Christian gospel should be separated from the history of its various interpretations, in the way that a kernel might be separated from a husk (the metaphor would strangely reappear in Nida, with reference to Chomsky). For Loisy, historical tradition cannot simply be discarded as inessential, since it represents the accumulated work of the gospel and is essential as way of coming to know the message. This position underlay what is known as "modernism" in Catholicism, a movement that lasted from around 1890 to 1907, when it was ended by a Papal encyclical (Loisy himself was excommunicated in 1908). One consequence of this position is that the message itself, the gospel, must change as historical knowledge changes. Although not primarily concerned with translation, Loisy's arguments would support a text that is constantly being reworked in order to speak to contemporary situations, without obliterating the centuries of accumulated tradition. Such textuality, still subordinate to collective experience, would be everything *except* representation of a source. The text to be translated is at the same time the sum of all its historical translations. The same paradox has been formulated for literary translation by the French theorist Léon Robel: "the text is the set of all its significantly different translations" (1973: 8). Such would be one extremely logical consequence of a non-representational epistemology: translators do not represent, they extend, and they do so by building on previous extensions. This position would be close to the *Fortleben*, the "afterlife", that Walter Benjamin (1923) saw translations offering their sources. However, the Christian message, unlike the "pure language" that Benjamin placed in the past, is supposed not to have died.

Representational epistemologies

In a representational epistemology, whatever spirit there may be would enable the translator to reach a true understanding of the message *only as expressed in the source text*, which will then be represented in the translation. The moment of representation could require considerable work, and the resulting translation may remain highly imperfect. As much as there could be something divine in the moment of understanding, actual translations are human products, linguistic, fallible, always awaiting revision.

Trust is thus necessarily restricted to the first moment, the understanding of message, which is not to be confused with the reproduction of message in language. This scinded epistemology (understanding, then production) underlies all the humility tropes that litter countless translators' prefaces, begging forgiveness for the inferior status of the translation with respect to the original texts. It is common, non-paradoxical, and by no means universal.

As we have seen, Augustine's thought on translation was ultimately non-representational (the spirit moved the translators). However, much of his insight is also semiotic in inspiration, attempting to analyze the way signs represent meanings. While admitting that different translations of the Scriptures may say different things, Augustine recommends that readers not limit themselves to just one translation: "an inspection of various translations frequently makes obscure passages clear" (*De doctrina christiana* 17). If this is possible, then those different translations must in some way *represent* the same thing, perhaps in the way that two eyes give different images but thereby enable depth in vision. We are apparently not to trust the spirit alone. In *De catechizandis rudibus* (2.3. 1-6) Augustine offers an intriguing representational epistemology that would give a psycholinguistic explanation of why different translations can be complementary. Here the process of representation goes from ideas to "traces" or "vestiges" (*uestigia*), and only then to language:

> […] the idea erupts in my mind like a rapid illumination, whereas my speech is long and delayed and not at all like the idea, and while I speak, the thought has hidden in its secret place. The idea has left no more than a few vestiges imprinted in my memory, and those vestiges linger throughout the slowness of my words. From those vestiges we construe sounds, and we speak Latin, or Greek, or Hebrew, or any other language. But the vestiges are not Latin, nor Greek, nor Hebrew, nor of any other community. They are formed in the mind, just as a facial expression is formed in the body.

Ideas come as light, and language is like no more than a weak trace of that light, as when you close your eyes immediately after seeing a bright object. Yet Augustine does not abandon communication altogether. What is communicated is here *anterior to language*, and thus potentially available to all. Our words will have sense for someone who has experienced the same light, who has a memory of the same traces. For this Augustine, our texts need not communicate messages as such (language remains indeterminate); texts can help receivers *recall* the illuminations that they have either previously found for themselves or for which they are adequately prepared (as in Augustine's own conversion while reading). Understanding would ultimately come from personal experience, to which linguistic communication can at best be an aid.

On this reading of Augustine, translation from one language to another is quite possible and even banal, since what is translated is no more than a set of inadequate reminders. The message operates at an anterior level, in the space also shared by theories of divine illumination, immediate mystical understanding, or paths of faith. In this, the theory could be brought into line with contemporary constructivist (and deconstructionist) epistemologies, according to which we do not transfer knowledge about the world, we actively construe the world through our own experience. Without the light of experience, might say Augustine, there can be no understanding. The resulting theory is partly representational, since language represents that which we are supposed to remember. Yet the exactitude of the representation is in this case strangely indifferent. In theory, any translation could do, and one translation may aid another.

The fact that Augustine can be cited as a theorist of both representational and non-representational epistemologies should not surprise us. As a thinker, he was attempting to reconcile Platonic representation with a religion of inspiration. The tradition of Bible translation should thus be seen as a debate at its source, cutting across the binarisms that define the various camps. Spirit and form, signified and signifier, are indeed separated in countless practices and formulations. Yet it would be wrong to reduce that tradition to one paradigm or the other. Indeed, it would be misleading to seek all that tradition in Augustine alone.

Hierarchies of languages

Medieval approaches to translation also involved quite a different approach to representation. There were widespread beliefs that the embodiment of message was not just in a written text, but in an entire language. If the biblical texts were divine, and those texts were in Hebrew and Greek, then Hebrew and Greek had to be divine languages. Biblical Greek would also have received divine spirit through the miraculous Septuagint translation. Roger Bacon also recognized Arabic as a sacred language, in recognition of the Qur'an, and Sanskrit is sometimes added to the list variously in deference to Brahmanism or Mahayana Buddhism. Further, if the divine message could be embodied in Jerome's authorized Latin Vulgate, then Latin must also be close to divine status, although Bacon placed Latin on a lower rung, on a level with the sciences (*Opus minor*, cf. Bourgain 1989). This sets up a model where meaning tumbles down a hierarchy of languages, from the divine or close-to-divine (Hebrew, Greek) to the authorized (Latin), to the national vernaculars (such as French, German, Spanish), to the patois (the various non-written local varieties). Biblical translation would almost always move downwards in this hierarchy, from the languages closest to the divine written word to those furthest away. Each downward movement would involve loss, simply because of the inferior status of the language being translated into. In this model, translation cannot aspire to anything like equivalence. Each translation will necessarily be inferior to its original, simply because the target language is not yet ready to receive the fullness of the message. To be sure, from the thirteenth century translation was seen as a way in which languages (mainly the rising national vernaculars of Europe) could improve their status, preparing themselves to rival Latin. Yet it is only in the Renaissance, from the fifteenth-century influence of Leonardo Bruni, that the languages entering into translational relationships are conceived of as being equal in potential. Only then could equivalence become a possible aim of translation, well before it was named as such.

The fiction of equal languages coincided more or less with the rise of national vernaculars, print culture, and the Reformist scission of Europe. In that political and religious climate, representational epistemologies cared very much about the qualities of target texts, and thus with developing the matrices of target languages. That was the age of Erasmus, Luther, Tyndale, and the Protestant struggle for translations closer to the people, well down the rungs of the hierarchy of languages. Such would be the effective destruction of hierarchies of languages, and the beginning of ideals of equivalence. The debates then concerned content as doctrine, usually involving relations between authorized and unauthorized philology rather than epistemology as such.

A major shift within representational epistemology can nevertheless be associated with the historical critical tradition, with what we have mentioned as "higher criticism", which approached biblical texts as a series of historical utterances. For as much as that tradition would want to remain scientifically external to questions of

doctrine, it necessarily affected notions of the message to be represented. Briefly, if we can understand the historical situations in which texts were produced, we thus perceive the relation between text and situation, and we should be able to grasp the message as precisely that relation, a dynamic effect. Such a position breaks with the more traditional dependence on inscriptions; it places the message itself in a space configured by culture, sociology, and pragmatics. If understood in terms of function-in-situation, the message could then be reproduced for another situation. This would be the development of a particularly functional kind of equivalence, to which we shall return.

The important point is that functionalism of this kind was unthinkable within the medieval hierarchies of languages, since it assumes that all languages are equal in their capacity to express functions. The problematic point is that, in the postmodern age of electronic communications, languages are manifestly unequal in their communicative capacities. Most are without script; only a small minority are digitized. When we select one target language from between competing varieties, when one dialect receives relative standardization and others do not, the hierarchies are far from destroyed. Functionalism has not been able to do away with the contemporary hierarchies, which now go by the name of "language policy".

Authorization

Representation and inspiration concern epistemologies of production, of how translations are actually produced. The medieval hierarchy of languages, however, provided the ideological framework for a more external kind of epistemology, more concerned with judging the institutional value of different translations. The versions most highly valued in terms of the hierarchy were the ones most likely to be accepted as legitimate and thus used by ecclesiastical institutions. They would be "authorized", approved by the institution, accepted as fully representational translations.

One might see the practice of authorization as a mere application of the hierarchy of languages. In the practice of power, however, quite the reverse is probably truer. The medieval hierarchy of languages was constructed on the history of authorizations.

The epistemology of authorization should not be confused with what is generally known as equivalence. Authorization is of the whole text, not of fragments or functions. Authorization does not have different kinds, as does equivalence: the translation is authorized or it is not. Authorization in terms of the hierarchy accords a value to the relative distance of a text (an old translation is likely to remain authorized), equivalence annuls the value of historical duration. More important, authorization need not assume equal languages. On the contrary, the historical arguments for and against the authorization of particular translations tend to presuppose hierarchies in which value and representation receive a definite order. Authorization passes on the sacred already invested in the higher and older rungs.

That said, the fact of authorization allows that, in the space of reception, the whole translation is magically accepted as if it were not a translation. The translation would become the Word of God, very much like the workings of an idealized equivalence. The only problem is that, in the space of reception, the existence of an authorized version implies the simultaneous existence of *unauthorized* versions. Within this institutional epistemology, the plurality of translations (that is, the fact of translation) remains problematic.

Authorization has been used by different churches at different times in different ways. The general practice can certainly be seen as proof that the Christian tradition is

repressive and intolerant. When many variants are circulating, believers may not know which one to believe, and so, the ecclesiastical argument tends to run, the church will pick the right one for them. In so doing, they set about destroying the unauthorized versions, either ideologically or physically. Bibles have been destroyed: in 1233, for example, a church council in Tarragona, Hispania, ordered all vernacular bibles to be handed in to bishops to be burnt within eight days (Enciso 1944). The same thing happened periodically through to the mid sixteenth century, at least. Note, however, that those prohibitions were of *vernacular* translations only. The authorized text of the time, Jerome's Vulgate, stood above the fray, just as its Latin stood above the understanding of most believers. Thus used, authorization obviously reinforces the political power of the church, making it the only authority competent enough not only to select the right translation, but to understand it as well. Movements of meaning downwards in hierarchy then become the work of the church alone, notably through sermons and explanations that are unbound by the constraints of translation. When the Council of Tours declared, in 813, that all pronouncements and homilies from the pulpit should be in the language of the people ("...in rusticam romanam linguam aut theotiscan"), the bilingual or even trilingual church gained the role of mediator not only between Latin and the incipient national vernaculars, but also between the vernaculars and the patois. The resulting epistemology can only allow for popular understanding as mediated by the church.

Quite a different kind of authorization would seem to be at work in the Protestant tradition, where the text selected by the institution is reputedly close to the language of the common people. Indeed, the politics of the Lutheran Bible endeavor to *keep* the text close to the people, through a program of constant modification and updating. This should have an effect quite different from that of a distant but authorized Latin. However, the fact of authorization still remains; unauthorized versions are still devalued; the various institutions hesitate to embrace any vital plurality of competing translations. If there is plurality, it tends to take the form of old vs. new authorizations, as one finds in countless footnotes or in editions that give different authorized texts on facing pages. To do otherwise would involve actively de-authorizing the past of the same institution. Churches tend not to confess to bad translations; they just add better ones.

The manipulation of historical distance has not disappeared with the passing of old hierarchies. We find the evangelical television preacher preferring the King James Version, a big printed book in his hand, as he struts the stage with the power of its beautiful archaisms. Huge stadia fill with people trying to read the same obscure book, which they pay to have rendered from print into speech, from seventeenth-century into contemporary, and from British into a lively mix of General American and Black American Vernacular. The Authorized Version allows the preacher authority, as something of the sacred might yet tumble down the rungs.

With the notable exception of the Vulgate, authorization is mostly of collective translations. The great versions done by lone hands are rarely trusted to the same extent, and if they are trusted it is only after control and revision. Part of the reason for this might be found in the procedures of the translating committees themselves, which inevitably function as vetting and authorization processes. For that matter, the self-revision of the lone translator might be seen in the same light, at least to the extent that most translation forms only allow for one target-language variant to be selected. As we have seen, the historical epistemologies attach considerable importance to the difference between individual and collective translating. Individual translators are not normally allowed to rival the authorized voice of the author. The Spanish Protestant translator

Francisco de Enzinas was quite aware of this when he sought to avoid de-authorization of his sixteenth-century Castilian version of the New Testament. Aware that Emperor Charles V had ordered all copies to be seized, Enzinas thought he could get over the hurdle by dedicating his translation to the emperor and by going to Brussels to give him the first copy. This he did on 23 November 1543. When the emperor asked if he was the author, Enzinas intelligently replied, "No, the Holy Spirit is the author. I am only its faithful servant and weak instrument" (cit. Menéndez y Pelayo 1952-53: 2.17). The title-page of the translation does indeed specify "Habla Dios" (God Speaks). Bible translators have had a perennial interest in appearing to be subordinate. The text was promptly proscribed and Enzinas was imprisoned in Brussels. Does this mean that emperors, rather than the churches, can do the business of authorizing? In this case, the translator's imprisonment was quite probably to protect him from being sent to the Inquisition in Spain.

Authorization, we have mentioned, tends to be applied to whole translations, rather than to parts. This position has not been unchallenged. In 1546, when the Council of Trent was discussing whether to allow authorize the many vernacular translations that were circulating, one of the main arguments in favor of retaining only the Vulgate was that it protected certain parts of the Bible from common knowledge. One of the compromise solutions proposed, was that no real harm could come from allowing popular access to the proverbs of Solomon, the Psalms, the Acts of the Apostles, and so on. However, the common people, rustics, and low-born women should not be permitted access to the Apocalypse, the epistles of Paul—especially the one to the Romans—, Ezekiel, and other books that are so opaque that not even expert theologians can understand them (cf. Enciso 1944). The argument obviously failed. If opacity alone was the mainstay of ecclesiastical power, why not translate those passages as well, since they would still be as difficult to understand? At the Council of Trent, authorization remained an all-or-nothing affair. In subsequent historical practice, the problem is usually solved by not translating the whole of the two testaments. Colonial and postcolonial translations commonly start with the Gospels and some of Paul, leaving the difficult and boring sections for later,

The logic of authorization can have a blinding influence on the way we think about translation, even within actual practice. No matter how much one might hold the entire text to be sacred, not all passages can be of equal importance for all audiences. Some books and chapters are key to the purpose of a given translation situation, others are less so. Throughout history, those parts have attracted the extreme efforts of translators, retranslators and critics, since they have been recognized as high-risk for the authorization or non-authorization of a text. We pick up a translation and go straight to Isaiah 7:14, for example, to see if the *'almah* Mary is doomed to be a virgin. At the same time, however, countless other passages are of little consequence at all. Just think of all those genealogies once used to calculate the age of the world. They remain low-risk not only for authorization, but also for most effects on most readerships.

For as much as the external epistemologies of authorization would allow institutional power to dominate translation processes, the logics of production have always been more subtle and varied. Inspiration and representation still remain powerful paradigms, along with translators' normal desire not to work too hard.

Envoi: Historical epistemologies in Nida and Gutt

Each new generation retains the possibility of doing away with history. One can burn the libraries, as the Italian Futurist Marinetti wanted. But then, the new generation

would have to write new texts. In the case of sacred texts, that is quite hard to do. There are few clear substitutes for millennia of translations, debates and competing epistemologies. In the case of the Bible, it is very difficult to start afresh.

That is nevertheless what one seems to find in the most influential contemporary theorists of Bible translation. Especially in the work of Eugene Nida, there is a New World optimism that would reduce long-standing historical dilemmas to deceptively simple dichotomies, then trust that science (anthropology, ethnology, semiotics) will solve any technical problems that might result. Can history really be reduced so easily?

Nida's thought is decidedly within representational epistemology. For him, the meaningfulness of the source text is not to be questioned. Message can be represented in two basic ways: "formal equivalence" would represent the inscription of the source text, allowing for philological or literalist translations (the philological tradition is by no means rejected), whereas "dynamic equivalence" would reproduce the function, understood as the dynamic relationship between utterance and situation. To take a banal and oft-cited example, the "lamb of God" that we know in English-language Christianity might become the "seal of God" for an Inuit culture that knows a lot about seals but does not have many lambs. Nida's treatment of formal and dynamic equivalence is not equal, as can be seen in one of his fundamental definitions: "Translating consists in *reproducing* in the receptor language the closest *natural* equivalent of the source-language message" (Nida and Taber 1969: 12; cf. Nida 1959: 33; emphasis ours). The "natural" equivalent is most commonly the "dynamic" one, the item that was there before we entered (seals, not lambs). It is the message that, in theory, can be recreated for all cultures. This position moves translation away from the study of source texts as such, since "differences between cultures cause many more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (Nida 1964: 161). What is needed, from Nida's perspective, is extreme attention to the specifics of target cultures. The identification of such features should allow translations to achieve equivalent effects. Analysis of the receiving culture, not faith (especially alone), will lead to equivalents of message.

Nida's clear preference for dynamic equivalence is coherent with modernist evangelistic ideology, where message is to be made present to all people at all times. It very much requires the fiction of equal languages, and indeed of equal cultures. We might also see something of Augustine's divine spirit, causing translations to suit the people they address. However, Nida expresses most of his claims in terms of ethnographic and linguistic science rather than any legal fiction or epistemology of spirit. When he refers to equivalence being "formal" or "dynamic", his dichotomy connects with conservative translation theory, in fact with a tradition that can be dated back to Cicero (*ut interpres* vs. *ut orator*) or Schleiermacher ("foreignizing" vs. "domesticating" translation). Nida has little to say about epistemologies that, in the fringes of twentieth-century translation theory, attacked the concept of equivalence in favor of the indeterminacy of translation. The analytical skepticism of a Quine, the self-righteous poetics of a Meschonnic, or the gnawing grammatology of a Derrida are never allowed to question the message to be conveyed. There is little room for radical doubt, for inspiration, for the individual, or for language that habitually misrepresents. Similarly, when Nida (1964: 68) refers to the semantic "kernels" that would remain constant between versions, the metaphor comes from Chomsky, not from Harnack's concern with the historicity of spirit. For Chomsky's early transformational grammar, syntax can be broken down from its surface representation to underlying kernels, and then further to deep-seated universals. This would seem to have offered some guarantee of a message common to all translations. The surface level would perhaps act like

Augustine's vestiges of anterior message. Unfortunately, Chomsky's concern was strictly with syntax, not message. He consequently made it clear that "the existence of deep-seated *formal* universals [...] does not, for example, imply that there must be some reasonable procedure or translating between languages" (1965: 30; emphasis ours). Elsewhere, Chomsky (1980: 14-16) accepts considerable indeterminacy in translation (in Quine's sense). Nida's appeal to scientific analysis has nevertheless remained undaunted, investing great hope alternative approaches: "...only a sociolinguistic approach to translation is ultimately valid", and the theoretical activity concerned should belong to the broader discipline of "anthropological semiotics" (1976: 77). Those statements are nevertheless from a structuralist age, when the humanities were happy to look like objective science, ready to catalogue and categorize all the features of all cultures. That promise was never kept; the epistemological skepticisms of postmodernism have radically questioned the political role of the cataloguers and categorizers. Although ethnography might once have offered a scientific basis for translator's decisions, it is nowadays itself seen as just one way of translating cultures, subject to the same interests and uncertainties as any other translation. Nida's early ambitions now seem very much of their intellectual moment.

A similar representational stance underlies contemporary approaches such as relevance theory (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1988, Gutt 1991). Relevance theory accepts an idealist belief in the sender's "intention", which becomes the message to be recovered through language if communication is to be successful. That the reader or analyst can have access to that intention is an article of faith never properly addressed in relevance theory, and is merely assumed in Gutt's application of it. In relevance theory, however, an almost postmodern skepticism prevails with respect to the success of representation. As in Augustine's epistemology of light and traces, language at best gives "communicative clues" to authorial intention; it must constantly be interpreted in terms of its relation to situational determinants. The theorist of Bible translation then has reasons to take us through the many categories of pragmatics, once again somehow entrusting that the certainties of analysis will overcome the problems of millennial epistemologies.

Has scientific reflection then brought nothing fundamentally new to Bible translating? There has undoubtedly been progress in the identification and labeling of translation problems; there has generally been functionalist focus on the values of utterances within situations; philological science has generally followed the great lessons of higher criticism. However, that progress does not remove the major dilemmas. Consider the fundamental question of which situation the Biblical utterance is supposed to have meaning within. For Nida, the prime situation is that of the target culture, in its present state, to which adaptations should be made. For Gutt, on the other hand, the prime situation is that of the Biblical cultures themselves, which readers should learn about, and to which target languages should be adapted. This difference does not ensue from any kind of science. Nida's equivalence theory could be used to support Gutt's source-culture preference, just as Gutt's relevance theory could support Nida's dynamic equivalence. The difference in this case is not just between two versions of representational epistemology, but between two fundamentally different notions of Steiner's "initiative trust", in fact between two different notions of what is there to be translated. And that difference, if nothing else, echoes through the centuries.

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