

CHAPTER 5

THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD TRANSLATION

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* REMEMBER:
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* A good translation should be:
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* ACCURATE   The translator must re-express the meaning of
*              the original message as exactly as possible
*              in the language into which he is translating.
*
* CLEAR     The translation should be clear and
*              understandable.
*              The translator aims to communicate the message
*              in a way that people can readily understand.
*
* NATURAL   A translation should not sound 'foreign'.
*              It should not sound like a translation at all,
*              but like someone speaking in the natural,
*              everyday way.
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* Thus the three most important qualities of a good
* translation are:
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*              ACCURACY
*              CLARITY
*              and NATURALNESS
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When judging whether a translation is good or bad, there are three questions to ask:

1. Is the translation ACCURATE?

Does it communicate the exact meaning of the original message? Has the meaning been changed in any way?

Notice that an accurate translation is not one that is as near to the form of the original message as possible, but one that expresses the same meaning as exactly as possible.

A translation is inaccurate if the meaning of the translation is different in any way from the original message. This may include:

Omission: The translation is inaccurate if part of the meaning is missing.

Addition: The translation is inaccurate if anything has been added to the meaning.

Change: The translation is inaccurate if the meaning has been changed or twisted in any way.

2. Is the translation CLEAR?

Does the translation communicate the meaning? Do people understand what the translation means? Is what they understand in fact the original meaning that the author intended?

It should, however, be recognized that there are some parts of the Bible that are hard to understand because of the content of the message. Spiritual insight, given by the Holy Spirit, is needed. There are also some parts where further teaching and background knowledge is needed before the message can be fully understood.

For the translator, the important thing is that there is nothing in the wording of the translation that makes the message difficult to understand. The kind of language used should be that which makes the message as clear as possible.

3. Is the translation NATURAL?

Is this the kind of language our people use? Is it "sweet"?
Is it lively and interesting?

If you are not very careful, you will often carry over expressions from the language you are translating from. Careful checking and testing is needed to find the natural, idiomatic expression in the language.

EXERCISE 1

For each pair of sentences, state whether the two sentences are:

(1) the same in meaning (they are different ways of saying the same thing)
or (2) different in meaning.

1. (a) It rained all night.
(b) Rain fell all night. _____
2. (a) There is a book on the table.
(b) There is a book on the desk. _____
3. (a) John was very surprised when he heard the news.
(b) The news very much amazed John when he heard it. _____
4. (a) It was a hot day.
(b) The day was hot. _____
5. (a) Peter's house
(b) The house that belongs to Peter _____
6. (a) Mary's dress is too short for her.
(b) Mary's dress does not fit her well. _____
7. (a) I bought cloth to make a new dress for Mary.
(b) I bought a new dress for Mary. _____

8. (a) I bought vegetables in the market.
 (b) I bought tomatoes and onions in the market. _____
9. (a) My parents are well.
 (b) My mother and father are well. _____
10. (a) John is ill; he has malaria very badly.
 (b) John is very ill indeed. _____
11. (a) There are four rooms in the house.
 (b) The house has four rooms and a kitchen at the back. _____
12. (a) In my opinion the government is doing well and making many improvements in the country. But there are many people who do not agree that this is so.
 (b) Opinions are divided concerning the government. Some say they are doing well and making many improvements in the country. Others do not agree. _____

EXERCISE 2

For the following examples, selected from the first six verses of Acts 5, compare the NEW version with the RSV and, for each example, state:

- (1) Whether the NEW version is accurate or inaccurate.
 (2) If the NEW version is inaccurate, also state why it is inaccurate, i.e. what omissions, additions or changes have been made.
- (a) Acts 5:1 But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, (RSV)
 NEW But a man named Ananias and a woman called Sapphira sold a piece of property;
- (b) Acts 5:2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, (RSV)
 NEW he kept some of the money which he had got from the sale of the property, and his wife knew about this.
- (c) Acts 5:3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...?" (RSV)
 NEW But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan made you tell this lie?"
- (d) Acts 5:5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. (RSV)
 NEW When Ananias heard what Peter said, he fell down dead.
- (e) Acts 5:5 And great fear came upon all who heard of it. (RSV)
 NEW Everyone who heard what had happened was very afraid.

Literal versus Idiomatic

"A literal translation is characterized by a high transference of the *linguistic form* of the source language into the receptor language."

"On the other hand, an idiomatic translation aims at a high transference of *meaning* from the source language into the receptor language." (Beekman, 1965)

Compare:

Matthew 3:15

- a) Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.
- b) We will do well to conform in this way with all that God requires.

Matthew 3:8

- a) Bear fruit that befits repentance.
- b) Do the things that will show that you have turned from your sins.

1 Corinthians 15:20

- a) He has become the very first to rise of all who sleep the sleep of death.
- b) Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

James 3:13

- a) Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.
- b) If there are any wise or learned men among you, let them show it by their good lives, with humility and wisdom in their actions.

Rate:

(highly literal, modified literal, idiomatic, unduly free)

1 Cor 8:1 Now about the idolatrous sacrifices.....

- a) Now about working on Sunday....
- b) Now concerning things offered to idols....
- c) Now I will answer the question about food offered to idols....
- d) Now in regard to food which has been offered to idols...