Translating the Literature of Scripture: A Literary-Rhetorical Approach to Bible Translation

...The central issues to be dealt with in this presentation may be summed up in the following questions: What does it mean to translate the literature of Scripture – or its corollary, to translate the Scriptures as literature? Why introduce the subject of "literature" into the practice of translation at all? Is there a possible conflict of interests here since the Bible is a distinctly "theological" as well as a highly sacred book? Is not the task of the translator difficult enough without complicating the procedure by literary technicalities? To be sure, these queries must be addressed and answered in a satisfactory manner before we can proceed very far in our study.

Assuming, then, that an adequate response can be given, we are able to go into more detail: How can past and present methods of studying literature (literary criticism) and the formal discourse of persuasion (rhetorical criticism) help us to better understand, analyze, transmit, and teach translators about the diverse artistic texts of the Scriptures? … I begin in chapter 1 with the subject of literature in general as it is related to Bible translation, considering some of the key issues with respect to definition, the medium of communication, quality, scope, methodology, prominent precursors, motivation, and characteristic features… .

It needs to be stressed at the outset that there is not just one possibility here—a single "right" or "wrong" way of [translating a text]. Rather, a number of options … are available to a translation team depending on their capabilities and many other circumstances. I hope that my presentation comes across as being flexible enough to fit just about any translation program, from the less to the more literal and/or content-based in its fundamental ethos and outlook….  

Chapter 2 presents an overview of past and current studies that relate to a specifically "literary" type of version, both in the practice of Scripture translation itself and also in the field of contemporary secular approaches to the subject. In subsequent chapters I discuss various aspects of four prominent qualities of literature that contribute to the overall unity and communicative dynamics of the biblical text, namely, tectonicity (chap. 3), artistry (chap. 4), iconicity (chap. 5), and rhetoricity (chap. 6). I survey such important topics as genres, archetypes, the structural features of discourse, various formal or stylistic constituents of the elusive quality known as "artistry," and five distinct methods of rhetorical study, namely, those which stem from the rabbinic tradition, classical Greco-Roman oratory, Greek epistolary conventions, speech-act theory, and argument-structure analysis. This last topic is especially emphasized since it is not always given the attention it deserves in current Bible translation theory and practice.

In the second half of the book, beginning with chapter 7, attention is shifted from the more technical aspects of analyzing the source-language (SL) text to applying the results within the framework of an actual Bible translation program. First, I offer some practical guidelines for conducting a literary-rhetorical study of biblical literature, whether narrative or nonnarrative discourse. This leads to the consideration, in chapter 8, of a preliminary requirement, namely, the need for carrying out a systematic examination of oral and written verbal art in a given target language (TL)…. In chapter
9 I survey translation and teaching methodology with special reference to how current techniques may be augmented through the adoption of a literary perspective and set of procedures. In chapter 10 the application of a literary approach is illustrated by a specific research project in the Chichewa language (a Bantu language of south-central Africa) with respect to the analysis and translation of a familiar poetic passage (Psalm 23), as well as the procedures for and results of testing this translation. Chapter 11, the final chapter, is an overview of steps for organizing a literary-rhetorical translation project.

Contents

(Presentation of the author’s outline is modified for purposes of the website presentation.)

1. THE STUDY OF LITERATURE IN RELATION TO THE BIBLE AND ITS TRANSLATION
   1.1. Definition: What “literature” is
   1.2. Medium: Literature versus orature
   1.3. Quality: “Good” versus “poor” style in verbal art
   1.4. Scope: The extent to which the Scriptures contain literature
   1.5. Methodology: A literary-rhetorical (L-R) approach
   1.6. Motivation: Why study and translate the Bible as literature
   1.7. Models: Important L-R methodologies
   1.8. Strategy: The importance of a project Skopos
   1.9. A preview of things to come

2. DEFINING THE PARAMETERS OF A LITERARY-RHETORICAL TRANSLATION
   2.1. The value of a literary-rhetorical translation
   2.2. Background: The literary analysis of biblical literature
   2.3. The crucial question: Can the Bible be classified as literature?
   2.4. Some theories of literary translation
      2.4.1. Bible translation theorists
      2.4.2. Secular theorists
      2.4.2.1. Literalist approach
      2.4.2.2. Functionalist approach
2.4.2.3. Descriptive approach
2.4.2.4. Textlinguistic approach
2.4.2.5. Relevance approach
2.4.2.6. Interpretive approach
2.4.2.7. Comparative approach
2.4.2.8. Professional approach
2.4.3. Evaluating the various theories
2.5. The ambiguity of the term *literary translation*
  2.5.1. A social (popular) perspective
  2.5.2. A stylistic (technical) perspective
2.6. Defining *literary translation*
2.7. Translation as a complex "mediated" act of communication
2.8. A continuum of translation types
2.9. Where to set the L-R parameters
  2.9.1.1. Cost
  2.9.1.2. Gain

3. **TECTONICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES**
   3.1. Genres
      3.1.1. Emic categories
      3.1.2. Etic categories
         3.1.2.1. Poetry
         3.1.2.2. Prose
   3.2. Structures
      3.2.1. The four processes of discourse design
      3.2.2. The four techniques of discourse design
         3.2.2.1. An example of discourse design in the Scriptures – 1 Cor 13:4-13
   3.3. The importance for biblical interpretation of perceiving literary structure

4. **ARTISTRY OF THE SCRIPTURES**
   4.1. Artistry in relation to Scripture
      4.1.1. Figuration
      4.1.2. Documentation
      4.1.3. Repetition
      4.1.4. Compaction
      4.1.5. Deviation
      4.1.6. Phonation
      4.1.7. Evocation
      4.1.8. Dramatization
   4.2. Functions of artistry in biblical discourse
4.3. The Joseph Story: Biblical artistry in context
   4.3.1. Examples of figuration
   4.3.2. Examples of documentation
   4.3.3. Examples of repetition
   4.3.4. Examples of compaction
   4.3.5. Examples of deviation
   4.3.6. Examples of phonation
   4.3.7. Examples of evocation
   4.3.8. Examples of dramatization

4.4. The implications of artistic devices

5. ICONICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES
   5.1. Archetypes
      5.1.1. Symbols
      5.1.2. Character types
      5.1.3. Type scenes
      5.1.4. Literary-cultural categories
   5.2. The iconicity of the Epistle of James
   5.3. The value of studying the iconicity of the Scriptures

6. RHETORICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES
   6.1. Defining rhetoric
   6.2. Methods of rhetorical analysis
      6.2.1. The rabbinic/Christic technique
         6.2.1.1. Authoritative demeanor
         6.2.1.2. Prophetic style
         6.2.1.3. Wisdom tradition
         6.2.1.4. Dialogic technique
         6.2.1.5. Speaking in specifics
         6.2.1.6. Audience appeal and involvement
         6.2.1.7. Poetic composition
      6.2.2. The classical Greco-Roman rhetorical-oratorical method
      6.2.3. The epistolary method
      6.2.4. Speech-act analysis
      6.2.5. Argument-structure analysis
   6.3. The implicit dimension of rhetoric
   6.4. The importance of understanding the rhetoricity of TL literature
7. LITERARY-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

7.1. L-R analysis techniques for nonnarrative discourse
   7.1.1. Step 1: Study the complete textual, intertextual, and extratextual context
   7.1.2. Step 2: Read the entire text and determine its genre and subgenres
   7.1.3. Step 3: Plot all occurrences of recursion/repetition in the pericope
   7.1.4. Step 4: Find all instances of disjunction within the discourse
   7.1.5. Step 5: Isolate the areas of stylistic concentration
   7.1.6. Step 6: Identify the major points of discourse demarcation and projection
   7.1.7. Step 7: Outline the compositional structure of the entire pericope
   7.1.8. Step 8: Prepare a complete semantic (word/symbol/motif) study
   7.1.9. Step 9: Analyze any remaining linguistic and literary features
   7.1.10. Step 10: Note the major speech functions and their interaction in the discourse
   7.1.11. Step 11: Do an L-R comparison for possible form-functional matches
   7.1.12. Step 12: Prepare a trial translation and test it against other versions

7.2. L-R analysis techniques for narrative discourse
   7.2.1. Questions concerning events
   7.2.2. Questions concerning characters
   7.2.3. Questions concerning the setting
   7.2.4. Questions concerning the rhetoric of the text

7.3. Applying the twelve procedural steps to the Book of Obadiah
   7.3.1. Textual, intertextual, and extratextual context
   7.3.2. Genres and genre subtypes
   7.3.3. Random and patterned repetition
   7.3.4. Disjunction: Breaks and formulas
   7.3.5. Stylistic concentration
   7.3.6. Demarcation and projection
   7.3.7. Outline of compositional structure
   7.3.8. Word and motif study
   7.3.9. Other literary-rhetorical features
   7.3.10. Speech-act functions
   7.3.11. Corresponding TL devices
   7.3.12. Trial translation and testing

7.4. Summary

8. DETERMINING THE STYLISTIC AND RHETORICAL FEATURES OF TL LITERATURE

8.1. A literary-rhetorical analysis and application of TL verbal art forms
   8.1.1. Step 1: Constitution
   8.1.2. Step 2: Collection
   8.1.3. Step 3: Classification
   8.1.4. Step 4: Comparison
   8.1.5. Step 5: Compensation
8.1.6.  Step 6: Creation

8.1.7.  Step 7: Check-examination

8.1.8.  Step 8: Criticism

8.2.  The difference between literary and oratorical text

8.3.  The importance of comparing the literary features of SL and TL texts

8.4.  An L-R oratorical version illustrated: Ezek 37:1-10 in Chichewa

8.5.  Different translation styles for different types of consumer groups

8.6.  Some implications for Bible translation in Bantu Africa

9.  TEACHING A LITERARY-RHETORICAL APPROACH

9.1.  Laying the groundwork for the training of translators

9.1.1.  Building a strong literary-rhetorical emphasis within the project Brief

9.1.2.  Conducting an intensive L-R-oriented analysis of the SL text

9.1.3.  Determining the L-R stylistic resources available in the target language

9.1.4.  Translating a trial L-R version

9.1.5.  Assessing the equivalence of the SL and TL texts

9.1.6.  Testing and revising the draft translation

9.1.7.  Reviewing and documenting the lessons learned

9.2.  The relation of an L-R approach to translation theory and practice

9.2.1.  The uniqueness of Bible translation

9.2.2.  Putting the theories into practice

9.2.3.  An L-R perspective in relation to functional equivalence translation

9.3.  The necessity of high-quality translator training

9.4.  Training for ongoing testing

10.  ASSESSING A LITERARY-RHETORICAL TRANSLATION

10.1.  Translating the literary artistry of the Scriptures

10.1.1.  Can artistry survive its transformation into another language?

10.1.2.  Types of translation

10.1.3.  How artistry is transformed during the translation process

10.2.  The literary artistry of Psalm

10.2.1.  The macrostructure of Psalm

10.2.2.  The microstructure of Psalm

10.2.3.  The multifunctionalism of Psalm

10.3.  A stylistic comparison of Psalm in Hebrew and in Chichewa

10.4.  The importance of aurality

10.5.  Measuring acceptability

10.5.1.  The criterion of fidelity

10.5.2.  The criterion of intelligibility

10.5.3.  The criterion of idiomaticity

10.5.4.  The criterion of proximity

10.5.5.  Criteria of acceptability in application

10.5.6.  Other measures of acceptability

10.6.  Assessing a specific translation

10.6.1.  The testing methodology, a contextualized problem shaped approach

10.6.2.  Training the testing team
10.6.3. Testing the text for readability and legibility
10.6.4. Applying the testing methodology

10.7. The results of assessment
10.7.1. The literal version *Buku Lopatulika*
10.7.2. The popular-language version *Buku Loyera*
10.7.3. The hymn version
10.7.4. The ndakatulo poetic version
10.7.5. The reformatted popular-language version *Buku Loyera*

10.8. The practical and theoretical implications of this study
10.8.1. The implications for the test methodology
10.8.2. The implications for publishing, funding, and staffing
10.8.3. The implications for literary translation

11. ORGANIZING A LITERARY-RHETORICAL TRANSLATION PROJECT
11.1. The need for sufficient pre-project planning and research
11.2. Selecting and training the translation team
11.3. Compositional-translational procedures
11.4. Evaluating and testing the translation
11.5. Encouraging the TL audience's extensive and intensive involvement
11.6. Recommendations

A. APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENT TO CHAPTER

A.1. A Sample translations of Psalm
   A.1.1. Psalm 23 in the Masoretic Text and the RSV
   A.1.2. Psalm 23 from the Church of Scotland hymnal
   A.1.3. Psalm 23 from *The Message*
   A.1.4. Psalm 23 in Chichewa *Buku Lopatulika* (1922), formatted as published
   A.1.5. Psalm 23 in Chichewa *Buku Loyera* (1998), formatted as published
   A.1.6. Psalm 23 in Chichewa *Buku Loyera* (1998), reformatted for readability
   A.1.7. Psalm 23 in the Chichewa hymn version
   A.1.8. Psalm 23 in the *ndakatulo* poetic rendering

A.2. The questionnaire
   A.2.1. Personal background questions
   A.2.2. Practical assessment questions

A.3. A Statistical summary of results

B. APPENDIX B: AN L-R APPROACH APPLIED

B.1. Psalm 1 in the Masoretic Text and nine literary renditions
   B.1.1. Psalm 1 in Hebrew (Masoretic Text)
   B.1.2. Psalm 1 in English from *The Psalms In Verse*
   B.1.3. Psalm 1 in English from *The Message*
   B.1.4. Psalm 1 in English from Wilt
   B.1.5. Psalm 1 in English from Boerger
   B.1.6. Psalm 1 in German from *Die Gute Nachricht*
   B.1.7. Psalm 1 in Dutch from the *Nieuwe Bijbel VertaUng*
   B.1.8. Psalm 1 in Spanish from Tepox
B.1.9. Psalm 1 in the Chitonga ciyabilo poetic genre
B.1.10. Psalm 1 in the Chichewa ndakatulo genre

B.2. Christic rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount
   B.2.1. Architecture: Tectonic textual arrangement in Matthew 5—7
   B.2.2. The relevance of the printed format of a text
   B.2.3. Texture: Stylistic devices in rhetorical interaction
   B.2.4. Argumentation: Strategies of persuasion

B.3. Reproducing the rhetoric of Christ in the target language
   B.3.1. Survey of rhetorical resources in Chichewa
   B.3.2. Application: Selected examples from Christ's discourse in Chichewa
   B.3.3. Two poetic passages rendered poetically in Chichewa
   B.3.4. Evaluating a poetic-rhetorical translation

C. APPENDIX C: SAMPLE TRANSLATOR-TRAINING LESSON
   C.1. Malachi's writing style: How Malachi composed his message
   C.2. Structure: How Malachi organized his message
   C.3. Translation: A literary-rhetorical version of Malachi 3:6-12