

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

Ernst Wendland. Dallas: SIL International. 2004.

...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.

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