FOREIGNISING BIBLE TRANSLATION
RETAINING FOREIGN ORIGINS WHEN RENDERING SCRIPTURE

Andy Cheung

Summary

This article considers the notion of foreignisation with respect to Bible translation, a concept originating with Schleiermacher but re-popularised in the 1990s by Lawrence Venuti. 'Foreignising translation' aims to relocate the reader in the world of the source text and attempts to make obvious the alien origins of the original text. It therefore differs from 'domesticating translation' which seeks to create a target text with expressions and style more in keeping with target readers' receptor world conventions. Although foreignisation has long been established as a recognised translation strategy in 'secular' translation studies, it is less commonly considered with respect to Bible translation. This article discusses the benefits of foreignising translation in the task of rendering Scripture, albeit within a framework known among translation theorists as 'skopos theory', whereby multiple translation styles are permissible, depending on their usage and function in a target community.

1. Introduction

In 'secular' translation research, Lawrence Venuti advocates 'foreignising translation', whereby the foreign origins of the source text are made conspicuous in the translation.[1] This differs from the practice of what he calls 'domesticating translation' which seeks to produce fluent, easily understandable renderings typical of everyday literature in the target audience culture. Such domestication is strongly

---

[1]   Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (2nd edn; London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

criticised by Venuti who urges translators instead to render texts in such a way that readers may identify the foreign origins of the translation.

But some would argue that Venuti goes too far in his all or nothing approach to translation theory. Rather than advocating just one approach (i.e. foreignisation), the translator should consider the merits of both foreignisation and domestication, depending on the purpose of the translation. That is the perspective taken in this article: if the goal is to inform the reader of the source culture and make obvious the remote roots of the biblical text, then foreignisation is preferable. But often, particularly in Bible translation, the aim of a translation is to enable the reader to understand easily the essential message of the text using expressions and terms common in the readers' contemporary target culture. In such situations, foreignisation is less helpful and may even be harmful if it impedes the target readers' usage of the translation. So both approaches are acceptable, what matters is determining audience needs and expectations.

This approach, of translating according to audience needs, relativises translation and accords with what translation studies researchers call 'skopos theory', the idea that the form of a translation should be shaped by its intended purpose among a target audience. Under skopos theory, any translation type, be it foreignising or domesticating, idiomatic or literal, gender neutral or otherwise, is potentially viable according to the particular needs of the translation's readers. It is purpose driven translation: give the customers what they want, in other words.

This is why skopos theory is so important in this case. By asking first what potential readers might want, and leaving open the possibility of many different 'correct' translations, it legitimises special types of translations, those like foreignisation which might ordinarily be considered a bit fringe, too niche, or not suitable for mainstream purposes. If we only think about *one right way* to translate, it is not easy to justify foreignising translation because for many readers, the Bible really should be easy to understand and written in modern, straightforward language. Instead, what is being advocated here is something quite different, a Bible translation which is conspicuously alien, deliberately rooted in a remote culture and written in a style that emphasises its foreign origins. With skopos theory as an underlying

principle, this article presents reasons to consider undertaking translation with a foreignising function.

The opposite of foreignisation is domestication, which is somewhat similar to the concept of dynamic or functional equivalence, a popular approach in contemporary Bible translation, as seen in versions such as the GNB, CEV, and NCV. This article attempts to view translation activity from a foreignising perspective, not because domestication is wrong or bad (it is not), but because foreignisation is infrequently appreciated. For the sake of clarity, foreignisation should not be seen as comparable to literal or formal equivalence translation. In fact, foreignising translation does not carry a literal mandate, although literalism sometimes enables its goal of emphasising the foreign elements of the source text. Venuti reminds translators that foreignisation gives new options in the work of rendering a text (here, he uses 'resistancy' as a synonym for foreignisation):

> It is this sort of liberation that resistancy tries to produce in the translated text by resorting to techniques that make it strange and estranging in the receiving culture. Resistancy seeks to free the reader of the translation, as well as the translator, from the cultural constraints that ordinarily govern their reading and writing and threaten to overpower and domesticate the foreign text, annihilating its foreignness.[2]

The Bible is a natural participant in foreignising translation because it already contains much material with foreign origins. If foreignising translation seeks to display, even flaunt, the alien otherness of a source text world, the Bible is a most suitable choice for translation. Indeed, the original readers of the Bible found cultural elements difficult to understand, as in the case of Boaz and the sandal-removing ritual which necessitated in-text explanation in Ruth 4:7. The Bible itself is unashamedly foreign in many aspects.

On every page a reader encounters the distant past—a different thought-world, a different culture, a different way of daily life. In these writings the author, Paul, recounts visions and revelations. There are discussions about meat offered to idols, runaway slaves and slave-owners. The world centres around Rome and Jerusalem and is divided between Jews and Gentiles. Any translation, any interpretation, any reading of these texts must deal with the historical distance that exists

---

2   Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, 263.

between the world and life referred to in these writings and the world and life of the modern interpreter.[3]

Cyril Rodd has commented upon the problems of Bible translation produced with a fluency framework in that they hide the 'strange land' or foreign culture from which the biblical texts derive:

> It is, indeed, a strange land … many things conspire to hide its strangeness from us. Modern translations of the Bible iron out differences. Indeed, the attempt to provide 'dynamic equivalence' leads to the modernising of the Bible and rests ultimately on a belief that the Bible fits neatly into our modern culture and speaks directly to the twenty-first century.[4]

The following sections provide discussion of specific issues relating to the advantages of foreignisation in Bible translation. Examples are drawn from the Bible, with particular reference to issues such as anachronism, biblical imagery and terminology, metaphor, neologisms and transliteration.

2. Taste and Sensitivity

Domestication can lead to the avoidance of renderings that might be offensive to the target culture, but by adopting a foreignising translation, possibilities open up for readers to appreciate something that might otherwise be lost. An example relates to the rendering of Ἀσπάσασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ in Romans 16:16. A foreignising translation might adopt something fairly literal, such as, 'greet one another with a holy kiss' but this was rejected as a possibility by Newman and Nida who felt that such literal translation would be improper because it might be seen as 'silly and never something for adults to do'.[5] Unfortunately, this supposes that only one type of target audience exists (apparently, one that might frown upon unnecessary expressions of affection). The advantage of a skopos theory approach is that it allows the translator to shape the text according to the expectations of the target reader.

---

3   Dennis L. Stamps, 'Interpreting the language of St Paul' in *Translating Religious Texts: Translation, Transgression, and Interpretation*, ed. David Jasper (New York: St. Martin's, 1993): 26.

4   Cyril S. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001): 328.

5   Barclay N. Newman & Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973): 295.

Another example concerns the translation of שֵׁכָר in the Bible. In producing the NRSV, the translators wanted to depart from the usual renderings of 'strong drink' or 'liquor' (as in most translations) preferring instead 'beer'. The NRSV translators noted that in contemporary American English 'strong drink' means distilled liquor, which did not exist in ancient Israel. But having made the change in preproduction copies, the translators were surprised upon publication to find that the editorial committee had reverted the wording back to 'strong drink'.[6] Commenting upon the continuing nature of contemporary translations to avoid the word 'beer', Homan says that, 'There exists a disdain for beer in modern scholarship coupled with an exaggerated notion that wine owned a superior status to beer in antiquity'.[7]

3. Anachronism

The trouble with anachronisms is that they interfere with the historical recreation of the source text world; in the mind of the reader, the scene of a target text may be misplaced or misunderstood with the result that its remoteness is blurred. Examples of anachronism include *The Living Bible*'s account of Og's bedstead being displayed in a 'museum' (Deut. 3:11), or the rendering of Psalm 119:105 which says that 'Your words are a flashlight to light the path'. Elsewhere, Assyria is called 'Iraq' (Isa. 19:23) while the psalmist is left portraying ancient nations holding a 'summit conference' (Ps. 2:2).

Such examples are easy to find in idiomatic translations but anachronisms also exist in more literal versions. For example, the NASB describes an army's chariots as built with 'steel' (Nah. 3:2), while the AV anachronistically renders the Greek πάσχα (*pascha*) as 'Easter' in Acts 12:4 even though the word is a transliteration (via Aramaic) of the Hebrew פֶּסַח (*pesach*) meaning Passover. These examples from the NASB and AV are useful in serving as reminders that literal translations are not necessarily foreignising. Literalism is often associated with foreignisation, but is not the same: it is possible for a foreignising translation to be both free and idiomatic. It is,

---

6   J. J. M. Roberts, 'An Evaluation of the NRSV: Demystifying Bible Translation Insights', *Insights* 108 (1993): 25-36.

7   Michael M. Homan, 'Beer, Barley, and שֵׁכָר in the Hebrew Bible' in *Le-David Maskil: A Birthday Tribute for David Noel Freedman*, ed. Richard E. Friedman & William H. Propp (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004): 27.

however, the case that idiomatic translations (e.g. including dynamic or functional equivalence) are more prone to anachronisms, sometimes glaringly so, as can be seen from the following example:

> Matthew 1:19 Joseph, her <u>fiancé</u>, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the <u>engagement</u> quietly (NLT)

> Matthew 1:19 And her <u>husband</u> Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to <u>divorce</u> her quietly (ESV)

Here, the NLT depicts the relationship between Joseph and Mary in modern Western terms with the notion of a fiancé and an engagement. The reason for the NLT's rendering may be due to an attempt to avoid a possible problem found in most other translations (exemplified here by the ESV) which have Joseph as a husband contemplating divorce. When the subsequent verse quotes the angel advising Joseph to 'take Mary as your wife' readers may be left baffled if they are unaware of first-century customs relating to betrothal, questioning why Joseph, already described as Mary's husband, would be told to marry her.[8]

But the NLT's choice of translating the verse in terms of Joseph's 'engagement' to a 'fiancé' only hides the betrothal custom from the reader; it does not allow the reader to see the custom as it stands, even if it might appear strange or contradictory. In Venuti's terms, it does not 'flaunt' the strangeness of the situation but smooths out the scene by denying the reader the opportunity to see a glimpse of first century marriages.

4. Imagery and Terminology

The Bible contains numerous aspects deriving from its historical setting that are discernible in the form of its imagery and terminology. One of the downsides to idiomatic translation is that the reader may lose a

---

[8]   R. T. France explains the custom as follows: 'The difference between our modern concept of "engagement" and that of first-century Jews is indicated by the description of Joseph already in v. 19 as Mary's husband and by the use of the normal word for divorce … Though the couple were not yet living together, it was a binding contract entered into before witnesses which could be terminated only by death (which would leave the woman a "widow") or by divorce as if for a full marriage' (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007]: 50.)

sense of the remote cultures from which the biblical texts derive, of societies rooted in distant times and places:

> The Bible is not a Western Book. To be sure, it has generated ideas and attitudes that can be found everywhere in Western cultural and religious history. But the plain fact is that it was written by, for, and about people in the ancient Mediterranean world whose culture, worldview, social patterns, and daily expectations differed sharply from those of the modern West. The simple reality is that in spite of our fondest personal hopes, and even our religious aspirations, the Bible was not written for us.[9]

Some simple examples can demonstrate the problems of translating biblical imagery and terminology. In the following cases, the restatement of Hebrew expressions into common English can lead to the loss of a foreign effect, and a user might therefore read it without any inkling of domestication taking place.

> 1 Kings 2:9 you're wise enough to know that you must have him killed (CEV)

> 1 Kings 2:9 You are a wise man, and you will know how to arrange a bloody death for him (NLT)

But compare:

> 1 Kings 2:9 you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his grey head down with blood to Sheol (NRSV)

The NRSV brings the reader closer to the source text world with a more literal translation of the Hebrew imagery. The loss of a foreign resonance is unlikely to be noticed by readers of the CEV or NLT unless they have recourse to the original text or to another translation. In another example below, the portrayal of the return of Israel to Jerusalem has the travel routes depicted in terms which sound more in keeping with modern transportation:

> Jeremiah 31:21 People of Israel, fix the road signs. Put up signs to show you the way home. Watch the road. Pay attention to the road on which you travel (NCV)

> Jeremiah 31:21 Put up road signs. Set up stones to show the way. Look carefully for the highway. Look for the road you will take (NIrV)

---

9   Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *The New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Eugene: Cascade, 2007): ix.

But compare:

> Jeremiah 31:21 <u>Build cairns</u> to mark your way, <u>set up signposts</u>; make sure the road, <u>the path which you will tread</u> (REB)

The domesticating examples above may be defended on the basis of readability but sometimes, the pursuit of readability can result in the opposite effect. When established Christian vocabulary already exists in a language, the domestication of such terms can actually impede understanding among users who are accustomed to established, recognised terms. Consider the GNB, where it is questionable, given its Christian readership, whether it gains from any of the following: 'boat' instead of Noah's Ark (Gen. 6:14); 'covenant box' instead of ark of the Covenant (Exod. 24:10); 'lid' instead of mercy seat (Exod. 25:17); 'repayment offering' instead of guilt offering (Lev. 5:15); or 'enemy of Christ' instead of Antichrist (1 John 2:18).

The NCV likewise exchanges commonly recognised Christian vocabulary, using 'Holy Tent' rather than Tabernacle (Exod. 26:1) and 'agreement' rather than covenant, which leads to such renderings as 'the Ark of the Agreement', and Jesus speaking of 'my blood which is the new agreement' (Matt. 26:28). When a number of such terms are grouped together the results are even more striking. Compare for instance the CEV and ESV in the description of the earthly sanctuary in Hebrews 9:4-5:

> Hebrews 9:4-5 The gold altar that was used for burning incense was in this holy place. The <u>gold-covered sacred chest</u> was also there, and inside it were three things. First, there was a <u>gold jar</u> filled with manna. Then there was <u>Aaron's walking stick</u> that sprouted. Finally, there were the <u>flat stones with the Ten Commandments</u> written on them. [5]On top of the chest were the <u>glorious creatures with wings</u> opened out above the <u>place of mercy</u> (CEV)

> Hebrews 9:4-5 having the golden altar of incense and the <u>ark of the covenant</u> covered on all sides with gold, in which was a <u>golden urn</u> holding the manna, and <u>Aaron's staff</u> that budded, and the <u>tablets of the covenant</u>. Above it were the <u>cherubim of glory</u> overshadowing the <u>mercy seat</u> (ESV)

For audiences accustomed to traditional terms such as 'ark of the covenant' and 'cherubim of glory' such domesticating terms as 'gold-covered sacred chest' and 'glorious creatures with wings' not only limit the sense of otherness, but can actually obstruct comprehension by replacing conventional, well used terms with new variants. (In

situations where readers are not accustomed to the traditional terms, the usage of new variants is of course much more acceptable, since little advantage is gained by preserving older terms.)

5. Metaphor

The consideration of metaphor is an important issue for all translators because the metaphorical use of language is often culturally constrained. For those adopting a foreignising strategy, rendering metaphors as they stand gives translators a simple means of seasoning target texts with foreign flavour. The avoidance of metaphor, however, is a common feature of idiomatic translations where ease of understanding is a primary concern. Consider for example:

> Romans 12:20 Instead, as the scripture says: 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame.' (GNB)

> Romans 12:20 But, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink. If you do this, you will make him feel guilty and ashamed.' (GW)

But compare:

> Romans 12:20 No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads' (NRSV)

Not only do the idiomatic versions remove the foreign metaphor, but they prohibit the reader from seeing a connection with Proverbs 25:21-22. Another example can be found with the old and new man in Romans 6:6. By avoiding this metaphor, translations can lose the connection with Christ as the new man and second Adam. In a UBS Translator's Handbook (which offers guidance for translators), Newman and Nida write, 'In some languages "our old being" [i.e. old man] may be rendered as "what we used to be", "the way in which we used to live", or "as far as our being what we used to be"'.[10] That is indeed how the CEV renders the verse but it lacks the figurative sense found in the AV:

---

[10] Newman and Nida, *Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 115.

Romans 6:6 We know that the persons we used to be were nailed to the cross with Jesus. This was done, so that our sinful bodies would no longer be the slaves of sin (CEV)

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (AV)

Elsewhere, the idea of religious faith as a walk is prevalent throughout the Bible but not always translated as such in domesticating translations:

Galatians 5:16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves (NLT)

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh (NASB)

Also:

1 Kings 2:3 Observe the requirements of the LORD your God, and follow all his ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses (NLT)

1 Kings 2:3 and do what the Lord your God orders you to do. Obey all his laws and commands, as written in the Law of Moses (GNB)

1 Kings 2:3 and keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses (KJV)

Surprisingly, there are also instances of Bible translations which sidestep metaphors that have entered into everyday English parlance. An example of this can be found in the description of the promised land in the GNB:

Exodus 3:8 and so I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of Egypt to a spacious land, one which is rich and fertile (GNB)

Exodus 3:8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey (NRSV)

The expression 'one which is rich and fertile' is culturally neutral because farmland anywhere in the world might be described as such. But 'a land flowing with milk and honey' is well established in

Christian terminology, and its very use evokes an image of the promised land. Another example can be found in Psalm 23:

> Psalm 23:5 You treat me to a feast, while my enemies watch. <u>You honour me as your guest</u>, and you fill my cup until it overflows (CEV)

> Psalm 23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; <u>you anoint my head with oil</u>; my cup overflows (NRSV)

Once again, the description of anointing a person's head with oil is more likely to resonate with Christians in conjuring an image of the ancient Near East. The sense of distance is eliminated through the use of the culturally indistinct 'You honour me as your guest'.

Jan de Waard and Eugene Nida also discuss metaphors in *From One Language to Another*, giving suggestions on their retention. An example provided is: 'The expression "circumcision of the heart" (Rom. 2:29) is rarely understood *unless people have been specifically instructed* as to the figurative significance of circumcision' (emphasis added).[11] The impression one gets is that De Waard and Nida are pessimistic about the likelihood of readers being taught about circumcision and that it is better to find an alternative translation. A skopos theory approach allows translators to consider multiple possibilities for target texts: where readers prefer a translation with cultural artefacts left intact, a foreignising translation should be preferred. This brings to mind an anecdote told by Marshall Broomhall describing the tensions between Western translators and their Chinese counterparts in early collaborations on Chinese Bible translation:

> For the first time all, or nearly all of the figures of speech contained in the original Greek, appeared in the Mandarin version. 'To be clothed upon with a house', or 'to put on a man', are fairly bold figures. In previous translations the temptation had been to paraphrase such expressions or give a marginal reading but during the work of this committee one of the Chinese scholars broke in: 'Do you suppose that we Chinese cannot understand and appreciate metaphors? Our books are full of them, and new ones are welcome.'[12]

As an example, euphemisms for sex in the Old Testament may be easily recognised by Chinese readers where such metaphors and

---

[11] Jan de Waard and Eugene Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville: Nelson, 1986): 38.

[12] Marshall Broomhall, *The Bible in China* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1934): 93.

euphemisms are common. Genesis 4:1 literally says that Adam 'knew' Eve but the NLT translates as, 'Adam had sexual relations with his wife'. But in Chinese writing, sexual images are commonly presented in opaque and poetic terms, even in today's literature. Examples of metaphors for intercourse in Chinese include *yushuizhihuan* (literally, 'the joy of fish in water') and *yunyu* ('the activity of clouds and rain').

For foreignising translation, metaphor is to be embraced rather than suppressed and should be used as a means to direct the reader towards the unfamiliar surroundings of a different world. In some parts of the Bible, notably New Testament epistles, there are fewer metaphors compared with poetic books or wisdom literature, and so translators may need to be particularly concerned for their reproduction in target texts.

6. Neologism

A useful technique in foreignising translation is the use of neologism because they immediately force non-native expressions into the target text. Moreover, neologisms avoid problems associated with confused semantic ranges when words are taken from the target language and invested with a new Christian meaning.

Neologisms can thus be an effective means of emphasising the foreign origins of the translated text, but the usage of such words can impede understanding by target readers. Nevertheless, communities receiving Bible translation can accept and adapt to newly invented terms: Roland Boer recounts a brief history of translation among Australian Aborigines, noting that translators had successfully introduced a neologism for God which was accepted and understood without apparent difficulty. The use of a freshly minted word had advantages over a previous choice, *tjukurpa*, which was taken from native spiritual usage and whose semantic range covers other meanings including 'story', 'dreaming' and 'message'.[13] The problem with using pre-existing terms is not just the potential for confusion with other, established usage but also that it might steer the reader away from the cultural otherness of the source text.

---

[13] Roland Boer, *Last Stop before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia* (2nd edn; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008): 153-56.

Neologisms are actually a feature of historical English Bible translations, most famously with Tyndale's invention of terms such as *atonement, intercession, peacemaker, scapegoat* and *Passover*. It is sometimes easily forgotten that English Christian vernacular is heavily influenced by terms and phrases introduced through translation. Ironically, modern English versions such as the NLT or GNB avoid terms such as atonement, opting instead for 'make right' or 'purify', because it is considered inappropriate to translate with uncommonly used English terms, even if they have been readily understood in Christian circles for over 450 years. (But again, a word of defence for the NLT, GNB and others: such dynamic equivalence translations aim for readability and ease of understanding, so although traditional terms such as 'atonement' may be well established, some contemporary readers may still be best served by a modern equivalent. Translate according to target readers' needs, as skopos theory directs us.)

7. Transliteration

Transliteration can be an effective means of enforcing the foreignising effect upon the reader by introducing a morphologically foreign word into the text. The advantages are similar to neologism but without the need for creativity in fashioning new terms. Like neologisms, the effect can be a lack of user-friendliness but from the perspective of skopos Theory, such translation is not deficient if the target audience is capable and willing to accept such transliteration.

An example can be found with Bible translation among the Guarani of Brazil. An early version was not favoured because it was seen as too idiomatic, so in creating a replacement, the translators used transliteration in situations where no Guarani word was available. Thus, words for 'temple' and 'camel' were transliterated rather than using 'place where God was worshipped' and 'cow', as found in the idiomatic version. (The transliteration was necessary because there were no temples or camels in Guarani culture.)[14]

English translations already use transliteration, with examples including *Amen, Sheol* and *Abaddon*, while less well known words include *go'el* for 'kinsman-redeemer', or *qohelet* for 'teacher' or

---

[14] Robert A. Dooley, 'Style and Acceptability: the Guarani New Testament', *Notes on Translation* 3:1 (1989): 49-57.

'assembly leader'. The most common usage of transliteration in English versions, however, is in proper nouns, particularly Hebrew names. When transliterations are avoided, as seen commonly with idiomatic versions, the effect may appear somewhat odd, particularly if the reader is accustomed to seeing transliterated versions. For example, in Isaiah 8:1, a transliterated name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, appears in nearly all Bible versions but the GNB opts instead for a translation, which not only precludes a foreignising effect but is not necessarily meaningful either:

> Isaiah 8:1 The Lord said to me, Take a large piece of writing material and write on it in large letters: Quick Loot, Fast Plunder (GNB)

> Isaiah 8:1 Then the Lord said to me, Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz (NRSV)

The GNB's rendering above is surprising, given that throughout the Bible, it nearly always transliterates names. The translation 'Quick Loot, Fast Plunder' may reflect common English but it also reduces the sense of otherness, a problem also seen in the following:

> Joshua 7:24 … everyone took Achan and the things he had stolen to Trouble Valley (CEV)

> Joshua 7:24 … they brought them up to the Valley of Achor (NRSV)

And:

> Genesis 35:8 Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak tree at Bethel, so they named that place Oak of Crying (NCV)

> Genesis 35:8 And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So it was called Allon-bacuth (NRSV)

Transliteration provides the opportunity for expanding the range of translation, while avoiding the problem of finding comparable terms in the target language. This is because the very nature of transliteration represents a kind of 'pass-the-buck of meaning' whereby the semantic range of the source text word is neither restricted nor enlarged but simply shuffled along for another translator to interpret. The problem in seeking lexical equivalents can be seen from an example in the Seventeeth Century where the Italian Jesuit priest, Matteo Ricci, produced a work in Chinese entitled *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. It was an attempt to demonstrate the compatibility of

Confucianism with Christianity in an endeavour to convert the Chinese to Catholicism, but appears to have met with little success apparently because Ricci used Confucian theological terms to express Christian concepts such as 'heaven', 'soul', 'sin' and 'God'. This led to significant confusion among his target readers and thus demonstrates the problem of using pre-existing terminology for new purposes.

Another more notorious example for Chinese Bible translators is known as the 'Term Question' debate. Briefly, this contentious and difficult controversy concerned the translation of key theological terms in the Bible. The most heated exchanges concerned how best to render words for 'God' but also included other important words such as 'Spirit' and 'baptism'. The basic facts are these: the dispute originated with early productions of Chinese translations in the mid-Nineteenth Century with two opposing camps, each preferring a particular word for God. One chose *shangdi* (literally, high ruler); the other *shen* ('spirit' or 'gods', depending on context). Leading authorities lined up on both sides with the British and Foreign Bible Society selecting *shangdi* and the American Bible Society choosing *shen*. The debate raged throughout the century without resolution, and *shen* and *shangdi* editions of the Bible are still used to this day by Chinese Christians.

Transliteration offers the possibility of adding a foreign flavour, a sense of strangeness, to a target text, although such usage would vary depending on the particular needs or expectations of the target audience. Indeed, audience expectations are key to the production of successful translations, with some cultures expressly expecting some kind of foreignising or non-fluent/non-domesticating translation.

8. Style

Users of Bible translations have also indicated preferences for a particular style of writing that is at odds with free or idiomatic translations. For example, it has been noted that Christians in Islamic countries are sometimes resistant to using Bibles rendered with everyday Arabic because it is felt that classical Arabic, as seen in the

Qur'an, is more appropriate for religious texts,[15] with the language itself giving the text a 'sacred aura'.[16]

Similar expectations of what might be called 'traditional sacred language' can be found elsewhere. The Today's Chinese Version (TCV) is a dynamic equivalence translation that was completed in 1979 and is best understood as the Chinese equivalent of the GNB. Despite obvious strengths, it is often dismissed as childish or simplistic among Chinese believers for whom the venerable Chinese Union Version is much more popular. Suee Yan Yu has rightly commented that:

> China has a long history of translating Buddhist sacred texts using the formal/literal translation principle. This has colored the audience's expectations regarding the translation of sacred texts. The formal translation principle adopted in the Chinese Union Version fits in well with this long-established tradition.[17]

These examples of a preference for foreignisation are taken mainly from a religious or Bible translation perspective, but the same experience has been noted from those working in 'secular' translation. From a Japanese perspective, Judy Wakabayashi has commented as follows:

> In Japan there has long been an acceptance, and even a welcoming, of language with a distinctly 'foreign' origin and texture. Openness toward this foreign-tinged style in translations into Japanese, and in original writing influenced by translations, contrasts with the inward-looking expectation in Anglophone circles that translations should sound smooth and natural in the target language.[18]

The purpose of foreignisation is not necessarily to retain archaic or original features, although that is usually a chief aspect (archaism is not the same as foreignising but is often used as a device). In addition, foreignisation does not specify how a translation should reflect its foreign origins, only that it should do so. Since cultural situations can differ, so might the means by which foreignisation is achieved and

---

[15] Ype Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing, History and Role of the Bible in Africa* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2002): 222.

[16] William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1991): 88.

[17] Suee Yan Yu, 'A Brief History of Bible Translation into Chinese and Its Contemporary Implications', *Journal of Biblical Text Research* 19 (2006): 168.

[18] Judy Wakabayashi, 'Translational Japanese: a transformative strangeness within', *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 6:1 (2009) <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal/article/view/848> [accessed 18 July 2012].

what is considered to be foreignising in one situation may not be so in another. The practice of foreignising translation mandates the translator—however best suitable—to deviate from the contemporary canon of literature (translated or otherwise) in the target culture, so as to retain the alien sense of the source text. But this is not to deny the validity or importance of domestication, for it is important to recognise that foreignisation is merely one of many possible approaches for translating the Bible. Indeed, if we had to choose one, just one, way of translating the Bible out of all the possibilities, it is doubtful that foreignising translation would be the most popular. But if translation is approached from the perspective of skopos theory, then a multitude of 'correct' translation possibilities emerge, each depending on target user function. That is why skopos theory is so important: it enables translators to think afresh about alternative ways of translating, and reading, the Bible.

9. Conclusion

A foreignising strategy should be seen as an important contribution to translation by enabling a target text to be made conspicuous as a translation of a foreign writing. It may be unashamedly alien, even brazen, about its origins from a different time and place and it provides particular advantages in Bible translation, given the remote roots of its original language and culture.

This article provides a range of reasons for which foreignisation is suitable for Bible readership today but this does not suggest that domestication is a poor choice. Skopos theorists argue that translations should be tailor made to serve a particular purpose. Or, to put it another way, the target text should be shaped by its potential usage among users. Bible translators are urged to consider the benefits of foreignisation for audiences who may desire alternatives to domesticating translations. The retention of metaphor, idiom and biblical imagery, can be a powerful means by which Bible readers are educated about the original culture of the Old and New Testament. Meanwhile, the avoidance of inadvertent anachronism, and the use of neologism and transliteration can prevent the possibility of leading unwary readers toward a misunderstanding of aspects of ancient culture.