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Long Lynne. *Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable?* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2005, 209 pp.

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*Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable?* edited by Lynne Long is a collection of reflections from translation specialists regarding the translation of religious texts from a wide range of traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sanskrit. Combining their experiences with existing literary translation, the authors give their perspectives on what makes scriptures untranslatable. The book is divided into two parts and Long stresses that most of the essays are shaped by the ideas of specialists like Benjamin, Steiner or Derrida.

In the introduction, Long tries to explain what makes religious texts holy and whether or not that contributes to their non-translatability. She argues that there is a necessity of religious translation as the world becomes a global village and cultures interact frequently. This need to translate religious texts stems from the fact that they are references and guides to many peoples in various cultural settings. According to Long, international mobility is also another determining factor due to the necessity of reconnecting with cultural roots. Long further argues that translation is also used as a language survival tool as was the case with Friesians in the Netherlands and the Catalanians in Spain.

In the first part, the authors identify what characterizes the translatability or untranslatability of religious texts. For instance, in the first chapter, Christopher

Shackle affirms that it is context rather than content that makes the holy untranslatable. This is to say that often, it is the difficulty to adjust religious texts to various cultural settings that makes the holy untranslatable. Long also identifies motives and intended audience as determinants of the structure of a translation and supports the idea that translation can be made difficult by the plausible lack of space in the target language; that is, the lack of vocabulary or the existence of specified cultural connotations of words in different cultural settings. The *Liturgicam Authenticam* is an example of such restricted texts in that the Vatican provides guidelines as to how the liturgy should be translated: 'it is to be kept in mind from the beginning that the translation of the liturgical texts of the Roman Liturgy is not so much a work of creative innovation as it is of rendering the original texts faithfully and accurately into the vernacular language'. This is to say that a translation should be faithful to the original. In his essay "Prophecy and Tongues: St. Paul, Interpreting and Building the House" however, Onur Toker raises a conflicting theory of fidelity, questioning whether the

mission of the translator is to transfer meaning and reach the greatest possible audience or forgo the audience and produce a literal, word for word translation as commended by The Vatican. He supports the notion that translation is mainly used to preserve a text that is central to the culture of a people: "If one's interpretation or translation manages to preserve the essential meaning of the Bible, then the house of Being in which one dwells is sound and one can confidently hope for salvation". However, he states that this desire to faithfully represent a people and its culture should not be as strong as that of transferring the general and meaningful aspects of that culture: "the essentials of translating scriptures are the preservation of the underlying meaning of the messages and not so much *verbum pro verbo* translation". Toker believes that in the process of scripture translation, the signifier (medium of communication, target language) is not as important as the signified (the ultimate message of the original text). Seen this way, translation is not unduly complicated and the holy becomes as translatable as any other text, as long as one is capable of separating the spirit of

the writing and the letter in which it is written.

Similarly, in “Texts and Contexts: Perspectives on Jewish Translations of the Hebrew Bible”, Leonard Greenspoon argues that a translation cannot really transfer the true meaning of a text: “Bible translations are intended to supplement, not supplant; complement, not replace, the original”. In chapter 8, “Holy Communicative? Current Approaches to Bible Translation Worldwide”, Peter Kirk argues that the holy is translatable because what matters is to transfer the meaning to a targeted audience. In this sense, he says that a translation depends on the targeted audience and that “the sense should take priority over the meaning”, that is, it does not matter whether or not the exact direct translation of words are provided as long as their context-specific meanings are understood by the target audience. He insists for example, that a Bible translation for a scholar should definitely be different from one for an adolescent or for a person without a high level of education. In this sense, Peter Kirk uses various possible approaches to religious text translation in order to show

the trade off between the transfer of meaning and the exact transcription of religious texts into target languages; namely, domestication (move text to reader) versus foreignising, formal correspondence versus dynamic equivalence and direct versus indirect translation. Kirk believes that depending on which approach is taken, religious texts can and should be translated.

In addition to the above mentioned factors, Kate Crosby states in “What Does Not Get Translated in Buddhist Studies and The Impact on Teaching” that the existence of a wide base for the origin language can be an obstacle to delivering the true meaning of a text. She believes that the relative vocabulary compatibility in the original and target languages can make the holy untranslatable. She says, for example, that the fact that different languages can have different versions of the same text poses an impediment because the target language will more often than not need to find adequate translations of the source language.

Specific language peculiarities can also make the holy untranslatable. For instance, the lack of terminology in the target language can make the translation of spe-

cific words difficult. Sometimes, failing to translate some words may leave out elements that are strategic to the understanding of a text. This lack of terminology can lead to elongated translation as a way to compensate for meaning, causing holy texts to be untranslatable because, often, publishers are wary of long texts. The same phenomenon is described by Jonathan Gold in chapter 10 “Guardian of the Translated Dharma: Sakya Pandita on the Role of the Tibetan Scholar” in which he uses specific examples of the Dharma, a Buddhist scripture. Gold points to the presence of technical vocabulary as being one of the drawbacks to Dharma translation. Different words are given different meanings according to the context, making it necessary for the translator to memorize some words and their contextual meanings. According to him, reading the Dharma will therefore entail a strong understanding of Sanskrit terms. He also stresses that when translators do not get the exact meaning of a word, they tend to add extra words, which may well be a clarification but not a replacement for the original word. Similarly, Abdul Raof argues in

chapter fourteen that religious texts, specifically the Qur’an, cannot possibly be translatable due to the cultural connotations of its revelation. He argues that ‘cultural transposition’ rather than literalness should be the focus of a translation given that words have different connotations in different cultural contexts. He cites for example the fact that dogs are associated with impurity in some parts of the Arab world when they are ‘a man’s best friend’ in the western world. Other examples of contextual difficulties are also provided. For instance, while pilgrimage can be given for the Arabic word Hajj, it may mean one thing to a Muslim and another to a Christian or a Buddhist. It therefore becomes imperative to place words in a specified cultural background. The basic argument is that no two languages are similar enough to deliver directly corresponding meanings. For this reason, any attempt to translate is confined to transferring meaning on a context-adjusted basis.

With a combination of general and specific illustrative examples, Lynne and the various authors have attempted to identify the factors that make holy texts untrans-

latable: the content versus the context of the text, as well as the targeted audience and the objective of the translator. For example, if the only objective of the translator is to transfer meaning, then the scriptures are as translatable as any other text. However, if the translator wants to engage in 'verbum pro verbo' translation, this can make religious texts untranslatable due to language base or lack of adequate vocabulary. They also identify what techniques are to be

used in order to reach the desired goals and audiences. They address, for example, whether or not to use direct versus indirect translation or domestication versus foreignizing of a text. Using specific examples, the authors successfully show that, depending on the goal, the audience, the context and the strategies adopted, religious texts may or may not be readily translatable.

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