

### **III. 1536—1546: Ten Years that Changed The Perception of the Translator**

Those who suppose translators lead hard lives today might want to consider the fate of their Sixteenth Century colleagues. During the ten years between 1536 and 1546, three famous translators met their death. One was tortured first and then burned at the stake in that great center of civilization, Paris. The second was strangled and then burnt in the city of Antwerp. And even though our third colleague died more naturally, it wasn't because half of Europe didn't long to see him hanged, drawn, quartered, and impaled in pieces.

In the most dramatic of these cases, the ostensible reason for the translator's execution was that he had inserted three extra words in his translation, words not clearly present in the original. And in this one particular case, the "accreditation experts" were at least literally correct. The translation by Étienne Dolet, our profession's most famous martyr, did in fact add three extra words and a great many others besides, though one of his biographers defends their use as adding to the clarity.

The Greek is difficult, to say the least, though not because the words are at all obscure or exotic: in fact any second-year Greek student is likely to have encountered them. It is the particle-ridden and elliptical nature of these outwardly simple words that presents the problem, and few translators

could make any sense of the passage *without* adding words to the text.

The second translator to die for his transgressions was William Tyndale, who came close to reaching the ripe old age of 44. More motivated by religious devotion than humanist passion, when he was only 20 he was so impressed by Luther's teachings that his friends in England expressed alarm. When he proposed imitating Luther's feat and translating the Bible into English, he was forced to flee to the then liberal shores of Germany. He still had to dodge arrest and run from printer to printer, but he finally succeeded in creating an English version of both the Christian texts and the Torah, which were then smuggled into England. For this feat his fellow church revisionist and fellow religious scholar Henry VIII put a price on Tyndale's head and eventually had him arrested in Belgium, where he was put to death in 1536 after spending a year in prison. His translation of the Bible is credited with influencing the later King James version

The last of our three "translator-warriors," Martin Luther, was the one man so many would have rejoiced to see crucified, and was the most successful both as a translator and as a charismatic figure. Let's listen to him talking about our craft:

And it's often happened to us that we've searched and asked for fourteen days—even for three or four weeks—

after a single word, and in all that time we haven't found it.

And I don't know if one can express the word *Liebe* (love) just as sincerely and fully in Latin or in other languages, so that it sounds and pounds through all the senses, as it does in our language.

Dear friend, now it's in German and finished; anyone can read and study the text; you can let your eyes run over three or four pages without ever hitting on a snag; and you don't even notice the stones and tree stumps that were there, because now you pass over all that as though on a well-polished surface; but we really had to sweat and take great pains before we could clear that road of stones and stumps.

Adapted from:

<http://language.home.sprynet.com/trandex/30years.htm>

**Reading Guidelines:**

After you read the text, start reflecting on it. Reading without thinking is like eating without digesting, as it goes. And as it is mentioned in the last paragraph "read and study the text" by examining difficult words and expressions, and by decoding compound and complex sentences into kernels.

**Q.I** Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: lead, fate, strangled, impaled, ostensible, extra, accreditation, exotic, ripe, revisionist, warrior, rejoice, pounds through, snag, stumps.

**Q.II** Derive as many words as you can from the following words: suppose, famous, dramatic, martyr, difficult, problem, devotion, impressed, bible, crucified, charismatic, express, notice.

**Q.III** Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: hard, great, long, inserted, present, clarity, outwardly, flee, dodge, single, polished.

**Q.IV** Answer the following questions briefly:

1. What kind of "dangerous" text were the three translators translating?
2. What do the inverted commas over accreditation experts connote?
3. How is Etienne Dolet defended by one of his biographers?
4. Why is Greek, and many other languages, difficult to translate?
5. What does "religious devotion than humanist passion" mean?
6. What does the third translator say about our craft?

**Q.V** Read, discuss and translate into plain Arabic the last three paragraphs.

Research Activity:

1. What was the text that Dolet translated "inaccurately"?  
What were the exact words which he added? Were the accreditation experts men of theology or translation professionals?
2. Do you agree with the position of a high ranking party member like we had before 2003 revising and cleansing your text of any "improper" words and expressions and oblige you the translator to follow the regime's diction?

**Quote of the Day:**

**All translation is a compromise – the effort to be literal and the effort to be idiomatic.**

Benjamin Jowett