

VIII. Democratizing Translation

Democracy in its simplest meanings implies the rule of the majority, and people exercising power to achieve their own hopes and wishes. In translation the majority exercises power on the translation process through the different steps right from the choice of the works to be translated to the choice of the "successful" translators and the suitable translation strategy to be applied. The majority also has a say in the final shape of the translation and the price of hardcovers and paperbacks.

To my knowledge the first translator who democratized translation was the theologian Martin Luther who played a pivotal role in the Reformation. The revolutionary step that was taken by Luther was his translation of the Old and later New Testament into East middle German, a dialect that was regionally broad and used by a wide segment of the German people. The use of the vernacular was and is still denounced by clergymen, Muslim clergymen included, because the vernacular is often viewed as a corruption inflicted upon the standard language. For this democratic move and for the addition of some little words for reasons of clarity and pure language, Luther was heavily criticized by the Church. He was accused of altering the unalterable and divine words of God. Very typical of Luther's orientation to translation is the famous quote below extolling the use of the language of the ordinary people:

You must ask the mother at home, the children in the street, the ordinary man in the market [sic] and look at their mouths, how they speak, and translate that way; then they'll understand and see that you're speaking to them in German."

The second move towards democratizing translation can be seen in Schleiermacher's suggestion of the two ways available for the true interpreter. Schleiermacher's second strategy says "... or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader".

The third important move to democratizing translation was advocated by the American towering translator and translation theorist Eugen A. Nida. By introducing his strategy of dynamic equivalence based on the principle of equivalent effect he is said to factor the receptors into the translation equation. For Nida, the TT message must be tailored according to the linguistic needs and cultural expectations of the receivers. This has to be done in the most natural terms. To achieve naturalness, one of the key requirements for Nida, adaptations of the lexicon, grammar and cultural references are very much essential. This standpoint by Nida was opposed by both translation experts and religious people. Prof. Edwin Gentzler, in his *Contemporary Theories of Translation*, criticizes dynamic equivalence as serving the interests of Protestant Christianity and its dominant discourse. Ironically, religious

men attack Nida because the adaptations seen necessary to achieve equivalent effect are deemed to change the very words of God and people involved are thus verging on the sacrilegious.

Schleiermacher's naturalizing strategy, domesticating in Venutian terms, has always been controversial. Questioning Nida's strategy of dynamic equivalence, renowned translation scholar Peter Newmark wonders whether readers should be offered everything on a plate, cut and dried.

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Reading Guidelines:

Notice that in your derivation of new words many words change their meanings and become completely different words: dialect and dialectic, for example.

Q.I Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: hardcovers, paperbacks, theologian, pivotal, reformation, testament, denounced, vernacular, advocated, towering, factor, equation, adaptations, dominant, verging, sacrilegious, domesticating, renowned.

Q.II Derive as many words as you can from the following words: democratizing, power, applied, dialect, inflicted, accused, lexicon, effect, adaptations, controversial, scholar.

Q.III Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: simplest, suitable, final, pivotal, criticized, natural, opposed, dominant, change, renowned.

Q.IV Answer the following questions briefly:

1. How does the majority exercise power on the process of translation?
2. What was the revolutionary move taken by Martin Luther to democratize translation?
3. What does Luther say about the language of ordinary people?
4. What is dynamic equivalence and how can it be achieved?
5. Why is the reason behind Genzler's attack of Nida?
6. Why are translation strategies, as well as all other aspects of translation, controversial?
7. What does Newmark say about the readers of translations?

Q.V Read Luther's quote above time and again and translate it into Arabic using the same simple and plain language.

Research Activity:

For Holz Mänttari, a functional theorist, translation is a communicative process involving a series of players. Who do you think the other players in addition to the translators and readers are.

Quote of the Day:

It is hard indeed to notice anything for which the languages available to us have no description.”

Alan Watts