Going ambiguous for reader empowerment

An exploration of the literal translation by Lu Zhen Zhong of First John of the New Testament

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Abstract. *Chinese biblical translation has been practiced along a rugged path for 200 years. At first, the whole enterprise was dominated by non-Chinese missionaries, who learnt Chinese only after they came to China. Chinese translators, who were mostly ignorant about Biblical Greek and Hebrew, were just "helpers" in polishing the translation done by the missionaries. The prestigious Chinese Union Version Translation was produced in this way. Not until half a century ago did Lu Zhen Zhong learn Biblical Greek and Hebrew. He managed to translate the whole Bible by himself (the New Testament first published in 1946; the complete translation released in 1970). This is the first translation that a native Chinese speaker rendered directly from Greek and Hebrew into a "literal Chinese version", as Lu himself described it. The Greek language of the Johannine books is renowned for its simplicity and clarity in expressing profound theological ideas. Our paper compares Lu Zhen Zhong's translation of First John with the Greek text and the Union Version, which has been acclaimed as the Chinese equivalent of English King James Version. Looking at Lu's literal translation, it can be deduced that he has introduced more ambiguity into the translation, which opens up exegetical possibilities to Chinese readers and empowers them for more interpretative possibilities.*

Introduction

Chinese biblical translation has been practiced for 200 years.[1] A lot of translations have been done in the past, each trying to reflect the source text as much as possible. Although we have many different translations of the Bible, there is no Chinese translation theory that can put all these translations into a spectrum and let the readers understand their differences. This paper is a preliminary effort to establish a theory of Chinese Bible translation by first

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[1] The Year 2007 is the 200th anniversary for the arrival of missionary Morrison in China. He has been recognized as the first person who translated the Bible into Chinese.

looking at a "literal" translation directly rendered from the original languages into Chinese.

A brief history of Chinese Bible translation

Chinese translations of the Bible can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (618–908 CE) (cf. Broomhall 2000, on which this section is based). However, the missionary activities were very short-lived and the translation work was also piecemeal. It is not until 200 years ago that the whole Bible was translated. Two missionaries, Robert Morrison (1782–1834) and Joshua Marshman (1768–1837), separately translated the whole text into Chinese. These translations were, of course, preliminary works that needed to be improved. From then on, the translation work has gone through many ups and downs. Many missionary agencies have tried to translate the Bible and there were controversies about the Chinese for terms such as God and Spirit.

Another monument of Chinese Bible translation was the Chinese Union Version (CUV) published 1919. This is a translation done by missionaries and Chinese "helpers". They used the modern Chinese to translate the whole Bible and the result is widely used today by Chinese across different parts of the world.

Individual efforts have been made since 1919. Although CUV has gained an important status, many people still try to translate the Bible. However, most of the translations after the CUV are only of part of the Bible and are translated from the English version rather than the original languages.

Lu Zhen Zhong was the first Chinese to translate the whole Bible from original language into Chinese. He also stated in the preface to his translation that he was to keep the consistency of word-usage for scholars and pastors, so that they could study the original text along with this translation (Lu 1946).

Methodology

This paper is preliminary to a larger project on the meaning of the "literal translation" of the Bible into Chinese, which may in turn provide a framework for the study of different translations of the Bible in Chinese. The first step is to look at Lu Zhen Zhong's translation (LZZ) because Lu explicitly stated that he was doing a literal translation. His translation was also the first complete version after the Chinese Union Version. Thus, comprehensive analysis of the Biblical texts is possible.

Among all the Biblical texts, we start with the Letter of First John in the New Testament because the text is renowned for its simplicity of language and limited usage of vocabulary. All the changes made by Lu to Johannine Letter should be the most vital changes that can reveal his translation

principles clearly. The LZZ will be compared with the CUV because the preface to the LZZ states that the translation was to fill in the gaps of CUV. Lu sees the CUV as being not good enough for scholars, pastors and exegetes who want to study the Bible. He is thus aiming at a literal translation that may not be fluent in Chinese but needs to be very literal for the sake of the exegetes. Therefore, the changes made by Lu as opposed to the authoritative CUV should be those reflecting his "literal" translation tendencies. This will allow us to investigate what is meant by "literal" translation in LZZ.

Translation comparison

Translating ST words with TT words of larger semantic domains

The most observable tendency in the Lu Zhen Zhong translation (LZZ) is the usage of words with large semantic domains. When his translation is compared with the Chinese Union Version, the nouns used by Lu always cover larger semantic domains, hence providing more interpretive possibilities for the readers.

In 1 John 2:16, the Greek word $\varepsilon\pi\iota\theta\upsilon\mu\iota\alpha$ appears twice. It means a great desire for something, which can be translated as desire, longing or craving. The Chinese Union Version (CUV) translates this word as *qing yu*, which means the desire for opposite sex. Lu's translation is *si1yu*, which literally means personal desire. In this case, we can see that Lu has expanded the word used by Union Version from the desire for opposite sex to desire in a more general sense.

Another example from the same verse is the Greek word $\alpha\lambda\alpha\zeta o\nu\varepsilon\iota\alpha$ which means pretension and arrogance in words and deeds. CUV translates this word as 驕傲 (jiao ao), which means the arrogant attitude. The LZZ translates the same word as 矜誇 (jin kua), which means being arrogant as well as showing off. The CUV only provides a word for psychological disposition, while the LZZ uses a word that includes both psychological and verbal presentation of the arrogant attitude.

The English Standard Version translation of 1 John 2:16 has, "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world." According to the CUV, the desires of the flesh and eyes are limited to the desire for opposite sex only, while the LZZ translation includes desires of any kind. For the CUV translation, pride is an internal disposition, while the LZZ enlarges the meaning to include verbal boosting of the self. Both terms translated by the LZZ give readers more room to explain the verse and to include more inappropriate dispositions.

Translating ST phrases with TT words of larger semantic domains

A similar observation can be made in 3:17. The ESV translates the verse as, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" The CUV translation of "in need" (χρειαν εχοντα) is 窮乏(qiong fa), meaning poor and without monetary deposits. The LZZ translation is 缺乏 (que fa), meaning a lack of both human and non-human resources. The LZZ is conveying exactly the meaning of Greek language. It gives the readers more space to explain the needs, from strictly monetary terms to generic needs.

Imagine a pastor advocating 1 John 2:15 in the pulpit: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (ESV). If he reads the CUV translation of "things in the world" as 事 (shi), the pastor can only say believers are not to love the business of the world. If the pastor reads from the LZZ translation 事務 (shi wu), he can expand the application to include business and objects of the world. In the Greek text, the whole term is rendered as τα εν τω κοσμω, which is a definite phrase consisting of a neuter article and a prepositional complementary phrase. It is possible to include the material objects and worldly affairs in this phrase.

Translating theologically loaded terms with more interpretive possibilities

We might say that the above examples are common terms that do not involve many theological controversies. When translating theologically loaded terms, the translator should be more cautious in expanding semantic domains. The translator may choose to limit the interpretive possibilities in order to minimize controversies. However, when we look at the LZZ translation of such terms, it seems that the tendency to expand semantic domains remains.

The most obvious example is the translation of the term παρακλητος in 1 John 2:1. There has been much discussion of this term. The most commonly used renditions are nouns meaing "advocate", following the Latin translators. This may be related to the role of a person who appears on another's behalf in a legal setting. The exact meaning ranges from mediator, intercessor, to helper in general. The CUV translation is 中保 (zhong bao), which means guarantor for a loan. The LZZ translates the same term as 代替 申求者 (dai ti shen qiu zhe). This is a compound noun combining four elements: substitute, explain, request and person. See the following analysis:

(1) 代替　　申　　求　　　者
　　　Substitute　explain　Request　person

The one [who] explains and requests for other.

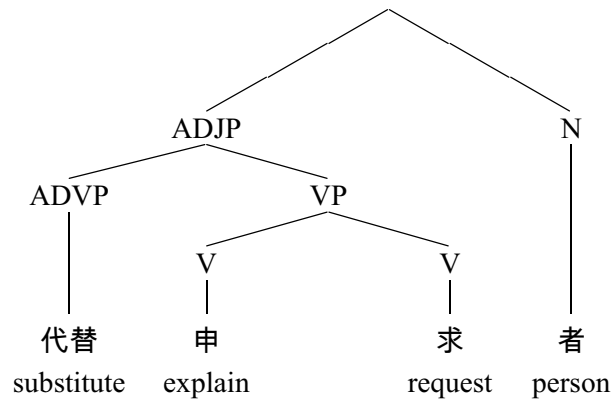The relationships between these terms can be presented in a tree diagram (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Constituent structure of the LZZ translation of παρακλητος

We can see that the LZZ devises a new term in Chinese. This term includes elements of a person who appears on other's behalf, explaining and making request for others. It can be related to a representative in a legal setting, but the simple term "lawyer" is avoided. Moreover, the LZZ adds a footnote to indicate that this term can be translated as "helper" as well. In this way, the LZZ provides the reader with many alternatives rather than selecting one gloss, as the CUV dones. This will surely give the readers more interpretive possibilities.

Another interesting LZZ translation of a theologically significant term is the translation of κοινωνια throughout the whole letter. In English, the term "fellowship" has been used. Nowadays, fellowship can refer to companionship and the form of a small group in the church setting. In Koine Greek, κοινωνια refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing. It is therefore a favorite expression for the marital relationship. The term can thus refer to the close relationship between God and human beings, as well as among human beings.

In the CUV, κοινωνια is translated as 相交 (xiang jiao), which means to make friends with each other. In the LZZ, the same term is coined as 團契 (tuan qi), which cannot be found in many Chinese lexicons. The only dictionary including the term 團契 (tuan qi) is the dictionary from Taiwan (Lin Yutang 2006) that explains it as a form of association or community in

the Christian church for young people. This is an interesting phenomenon. When Chinese who have never been to any Christian church are asked about the meaning of 團契 (tuan qi), they will not be able to tell the exact meaning. They may have never heard of the term. Even when a churchgoer is asked about the meaning of this term, the believer may point out that this is the name of the community or small group that exists in a church, but can hardly tell from the Chinese term what itmeans exactly.[2]

While the CUV chooses a term that generally indicates any interpersonal relationship, the LZZ goes further, using a term that does not exist in Chinese and the exact meaning of which cannot be exactly pinned down even by church-goers. This is an extremely ambiguous way to translate.

In 1 John 2:13, the noun phrase $\tau o\nu\ \pi o\nu\eta\rho o\nu$ is used to refer to the devil. This phrase consists of an article introducing an adjective that is used substantively. The CUV uses the term 惡者 (e zhe), which literally means "the fierce one". The LZZ renders the same term as 邪惡者(xie e zhe), which can be literally translated as "evil and fierce one". This again provides an interpretive possibility. The designated object is not only fierce but also evil.

Translating conjunctions with ambiguity

The ambiguity of the LZZ translation is also in conjunctions. The Greek $\kappa\alpha\iota$ can be understood as both a coordinative and a contrasting conjunction. When we compare 1 John 1:3, 1:7 and 2:9, we can see how the LZZ tries to be consistent with the original language by keeping the two possible interpretations. In 1 John 1:3, the CUV does not add any conjunction before the second sentence, which assumes the two sentences in a coordinating relationship. However, the LZZ adds a conjunction *er* before the second sentence. This Chinese conjunction can convey a coordinating as well as contrasting relationship. A similar situation occurs in 1 John 1:7, where the LZZ adds the same conjunction in the place where the CUV leaves out the conjunction.

The English translation of 1 John 2:9 reads, "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness" (ESV). Although the ESV translates the conjunction as "and" in English, the conjunction $\kappa\alpha\iota$ here can be interpreted as providing a contrasting relationship. The CUV sees this conjunction as contrasting and thus translates it as 卻 (que), which can only indicate contrasting relationship. On the other hand, the LZZ keeps using 而 (er), which can be coordinating as well as contrasting.

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[2] Information acquired through a personal interview with a Chinese born and breed in Taiwan on 27/8/2006.

In this example we can see that the LZZ is not deciding the relationship between the sentences. It leaves the decision to the readers and lets them decide whether the sentences are coordinating or contrasting. This opens up interpretative possibilities and gives freedom to the Chinese readers.

Providing reference possibilities for pronouns

The LZZ not only provides interpretive possibilities by enlarging semantic domains, it also provides more reference possibilities when translating pronouns. In 1 John 2:10, the dative pronoun can be masculine or neuter. The CUV takes the masculine option and translates it as 主 (zhu), which means "Lord". The LZZ takes the neuter meaning and translates it as 光 (guang), which means "light". The LZZ also adds a footnote explaining that 光 (guang) in Chinese is actually a third-person pronoun that can be translated as neuter or masculine. It is obvious that the LZZ is trying to provide another interpretive option different from that of the CUV. It is also pointing out why it is possible to translate the pronoun in two ways.

Translating verbs with temporal and aspectual information

The tenses and aspects of verbs are presented syntactically rather than morphologically in Chinese. Thus, when a translator decides to add a tense or aspect element, they add temporal and aspectual words to the sentence. These indications are not necessary in Chinese writings and are sometimes unnatural.

It is obvious that the LZZ always explicitly translates the perfect tense by 過 (guo). In 1 John 2:8, the translator even provides the perfect and present information for the phrase $\tau o\ \alpha\lambda\eta\theta\iota\nu o\nu\ \eta\delta\eta\ \phi\alpha\iota\nu\epsilon\iota$. The term $\eta\delta\eta$ is an adverb indicating the perfective aspect. The verb itself is in the present tense. The CUV translates the adverb indicating the perfective explicitly, but does not the present tense of the verb. The LZZ translation adds the word 已 (yi), indicating the perfective, before the verb and another word 著 (zhe), indicating the present tense, after the verb. In this way, the LZZ provides more information for the readers.

Using inclusive language

Inclusive language has been discussed for many years with regard to English translations. Due to cultural difference and historical practice, we know that the masculine vocatives in the Bible are always addressing humankind. In 1 John 3:2, the vocative $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\tau o\iota$ is a noun in the masculine plural form. The CUV translates it as "Dear brothers", while the LZZ gives the word "Dear"

to address all humankind. Use of this inclusive language is also a way to provide ambiguity in the target text, which in turn allows more room for interpretation.

Translation summary

From the above analysis we can see that the "literal translation" claimed by the LZZ actually produces more ambiguity in the translation. The LZZ does this by translating with words of larger semantic domains and by enlarging the semantic domains of general nouns, phrases and even theologically loaded terms. It also tries to provide both coordinating and contrasting properties to the same conjunction. The verbs are provided with temporal and aspectual indicators. The use of inclusive language also gives the readers more interpretive freedom.

It is obvious that this tendency to provide more ambiguity runs across different categories. The readers of the LZZ translation can include more ideas in each word. They can choose to interpret the sentence relationship in coordinating or contrasting ways. They will be provided with information about tenses, aspects, possible linkages for pronouns and the possible interpretation of inclusive language.

Since most Chinese pastors and believers do not read the original languages, their interpretation is based on the translated text. A text including more ambiguity will give them more freedom in interpretation, especially when one considers that the Bible is a sacred text that will be studied many times and even memorized. It is possible for readers to study each word and to interpret it in a detailed way. Even if pastors can read the New Testament in the original language, how can they convey their interpretation to the general listeners if that interpretation does not exist in the CUV? Quoting an existing version in Chinese will surely support the pastors' argument from the pulpit. The LZZ is a translation that can allow pastors to point out the possible interpretive directions to support their own position.

The LZZ claims to be a literal translation. At first glance, it may be assumed that this translation is close to a word-for-word translation. When we look at the target text, however, we discover that it is actually introducing more ambiguity rather than clarifying the each word and the relationships between words. This can be seen as a translation that sometimes speaks against the interpretive decision made by the CUV, which was composed by missionaries and local Chinese "helpers". It is by empowering the readers to interpret the text that this translation is actually serving the Chinese. The readers of the LZZ can use their knowledge of the Chinese language to gain more freedom in their interpretation. In other words, they can be freed from the choices made by the missionaries many years ago.

Further studies

As a preliminary study of a larger project to investigate what is meant by "literal translation" in Chinese Bible translation, this paper has shown that the word "literal" used by the LZZ means providing more interpretive power to the readers.

The meaning of "literal translation" in Chinese still needs to be explored. We may need a larger-scale comparison of the LZZ with the CUV. Whether a good translation should include so many ambiguities is another question.

However, the most important issue that needs to be addressed is to build a framework that can present the characteristics of different Chinese Bible translations. There are several Chinese Bible translation projects being carried out nowadays and all of them claim to be faithful to the original languages. It is our obligation as Bible translation scholars to tell readers what is actually being done in a translation rather than just claiming to be "literal" or "truthful". Further studies and analysis should also help readers understand the text and should guide them to use appropriate strategies when approaching different translations.

References

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