

2. Theories of Translation and Interpretation

2.1.2 TRANSLATION IN THE MIDDLE AGES (500-1500 A.D.)

Introduction

The years, from 500 to 1500, are called the Middle Ages. They are between the ancient days of Greece and Rome and the modern world. Things changed slowly during this long, thousand-year period. Historians have arbitrarily divided this period into two parts. The first part of the Middle Ages was a time of change and confusion. Moslem empire was expanding its dominancy and there was no power to stop its expansion. Innumerable but minor civil clashes and fights went on in Europe for centuries. Consequently, destruction, poverty and idleness dominated the whole Europe. For a long period, the main law was the law of force. Many valuable books were either lost or destroyed by the rival factions. The few Roman and Greek books that had been saved were in the monasteries and convents. Some nuns and monks worked as scribes. They made new copies of the old books, now and then.

From the fifth century to the seventh century and the advent of Islam, no significant record of scholarly work in translation has been recorded except the new versions of the Bible, mostly influenced by St. Jerome.

According to Ruth Ronald, Zayd Ibn-Thabit was the Holy Prophet Mohammad's (May peace be upon him) secretary, who knew Hebrew and Arabic well and he probably helped the Medina jews to use both Hebrew and Arabic in their correspondences with the Holy Prophet (1982:41).

Moslem Kingdom, founded by Abd Ar-Rahaman and his successors ruled a large part of Spain for more than 500 years. During this period, civilization

grew in Spain. Many Christian, Jewish, and Moslem scholars carried out researches and wrote books in Toledo and Cordova. Some of these scholars translated into Arabic the books of ancient Greece and Rome. From Spain Moslem civilization influenced the rest of Europe.

Under Czar Simon I (893-927 A.D.), the son of Boris I of Bulgaria, who had converted to Christianity, brilliant writers contributed works of literature and translators began rendering masterpieces, as much as they were available, into languages (Ruth Ronald, 1982:41). At this era, translators were mostly monks and well-educated scholars who were familiar with both colloquial and classic styles of languages, whereas interpreters tended to be common people who earned their livings through interpreting (Ronald, 1982:42).

From about 10th century, poetry was rendered in different vernacular languages (Kelly, 1979:222).

Nevertheless, despite the fact that in this age, reasoning dominated all philosophy and logics, theorists seem to have paid less attention to translation theory in general (Kelly, 1979:222).

In the early 1100s, life in Europe was changing. Europeans came to know much more about Asians and their traditions and languages. Finally, great developments and changes in the 14th century led to Renaissance and the end of the Middle Ages.

The major translators who contributed to the development of humanities in general and the art of translating in particular will be introduced in the following pages.

● Theories of Translation and Interpretation

2.1.2.1 TOLEDO (SPAIN) SCHOLARS

Toledo, a city in Spain, became the greatest center for translation in 714 A.D. Dominicio Gundisolfi founded a school for linguists which attracted hundreds of highly appreciated scholars for the next hundred years. The translator-training instructors were mostly Jews who had mastered Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. In this era, many of the Arabic versions of Aristotle were translated from Arabic into Latin (Robin, 1967:75). In later years, these books rather than the original Greek versions were mostly used by scholars who were interested in Aristotelian philosophy. Toledo School of Linguistics survived for many decades and finally, in 1250, became a center for Oriental studies in Europe (Ronald, 1982:46).

2.1.2.2 ALFRED THE GREAT (849-899)

He was a king of the West Saxons, whose efforts to defend his kingdom saved the English from Danish conquest. Alfred was an intellectual and highly motivated. He intended to disseminate culture and education in Europe in general and in England in particular. Unable to find teachers in England, he brought scholars and teachers from other territories and had them translate all the Latin books that he found useful into English (Encyclopedia Americana).

His own first translation was a translation of Pope Gregory's "Pastoral Care", which was made about 890 A.D. His next effort was to translate the Latin translation of Aristotle carried out by Boethius. He developed a new technique in translation which was rejected by his followers as unjustifiable. **He first translated the text into English prose and later tried to write it up into poetry** (Amos, 1920:18). His last work was a translation of Augustine and Pope Gregory's writings. Many other translations were carried by under his order and under his influence. Alfred's preface to the translation of Pope

Gregory's "Dialogues" indicates his service to the field. In his preface to Gregory's "Pastoral Care", Alfred shows to be a follower of Jerome's dictum in translating. He states:

"I began ... to translate into English ..., sometimes word for word and sometimes according to the sense."

(Amos, 1920:3)

2.1.2.3 AELFRIC (956-1010)

He was an Anglo-Saxon prose writer. He wrote many books to instruct the monks and nuns and to disseminate monastic learning to other communities. His major work "Catholic Homilies" (992 A.D.) contained sermons. He also wrote a Latin Grammar book, which was used in convents and monasteries.

In describing his theory of translation, Aelfric repeatedly confessed his devotion to the Jerome's well-known dictum 'sense for sense, not words for words'. A privilege attributed to Aelfric is that he advocated the use of "THE PURE AND OPEN WORDS OF THE LANGUAGE OF THIS PEOPLE" (from his latin preface to Homilies II) (Amos, 1920:4).

Aelfric used interpretation in some cases and believed that this technique could help the translation to be less tiresome. One of his significant characteristics was his openness to opposition made on his method of translation. These comments were made by other scholars who advocated more faithfulness to the original version (Amos, 1920:4).

2.1.2.4 MAIMONIDES, MOSES (1135-1204)

Twelfth Century witnessed a great scholar whose works laid the foundations to other scholarly works in later decades and centuries. He was a Jewish