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Analysis of Johnston's "Funeral Address for the Victims of the Atomic Bomb" From His English Translation of Nagai's *Nagasaki No Kane*

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Abstract:

In light of the 70th anniversary of the publication of Nagai Takashi's *Nagasaki No Kane*, I present the first English language analysis of a representative portion of its translated text. Entitled "Funeral Address for the Victims of the Atomic Bomb," the text was included in the English version of the book (*The Bells of Nagasaki*) that was translated by William Johnston in 1984. Through a detailed analysis of both source and target text, as well as a brief examination of the historical context, this represents an example of how the geopolitical climate at time of translation, as well as the translator's own background, may influence the choice of translation strategies employed overall as well as specific choices made by the translator. Johnston, himself an ordained priest like Nagai, produced a dynamically equivalent, domesticating text that was particularly suited to the historical context: a Western audience at the height of Cold War nuclear tensions.

Key Words: *translation criticism, domestication, foreignization, dynamic equivalence*

1. Introduction

Nagai Takashi's *Nagasaki No Kane* (1949), a firsthand account of the events surrounding the atomic destruction of Nagasaki, was completed in August 1946, just one year after the plutonium bomb was dropped. After a lengthy struggle with Allied Occupation authorities (Dower, 1999), the book finally reached the public in 1949 and became a bestseller, eventually being made into a movie. Nagai's unique perspective — that of scientist and Christian as well as casualty (Dower, 1999) — fascinated the people of Japan (Bix, 2000), and the book was still widely read in Japan when a translation by William Johnston entitled *The Bells of Nagasaki* finally reached English-speaking readers in 1984 (Coff, 1985), more than three decades after the original.

In a unique approach, Nagai examined the event and the subsequent human suffering using Christian symbolism and imagery (Saito, 2006), presenting the atomic bombings as the intervention of a benevolent Christian God designed to bring the war's madness to a halt (Dower, 1999), and his interpretation of events is laid out succinctly near the end of the book (Nagai, 1949) in a speech entitled "Funeral Address for the Victims of the Atomic Bomb."

The book's extremely long print run attests to its popularity as Japanese literature, but does it succeed as an effective English text for its target audience, an English-speaking readership living at the height of

Cold War nuclear tensions? How did the historical context at time of translation, as well as the translator's own background, influence the translation strategies he chose and the choices he made?

This paper represents a systematic analysis of Johnston's translation of the aforementioned speech, carried out in three parts: (1) examination of the target text (TT) in its own terms as a coherent text, (2) comparative analysis of both source text (ST) and TT texts to determine strategies employed by the translator to achieve his goals, and (3) examination of potential weaknesses in light of those strategies.

It will become apparent that Johnston has succeeded in producing a cohesive and coherent text that is dynamically equivalent (Nida, 2000) without being an unbounded translation (Catford, 1965). He used this combination of strategies to produce a mostly domesticating text likely to suit the particular circumstance of his readership circa 1984. The above resulted in a translation that, though not without its shortcomings, is at the same time faithful to the spirit of the original Japanese while being relevant and palatable to its target audience.

2. Johnston's translation as a readable English text

2.1 Coherence through cohesion

Though undoubtedly crucial to a translation's success, a text's coherence can be open to a great deal of interpretation depending on the reader. Therefore, it is necessary to find a means to quantify, if at all possible, the degree to which Johnston's English translation fulfills this criteria.

The ultimate measure will be cohesion, evidenced by the presence of cohesive devices (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Johnston's translation contains numerous instances of three of the more common types: reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, all of which contribute to the lucidity and understandability of the text.

2.1.1 Reference

The following paragraph serves as a representative example (reference in bold type, target underlined):

We¹ Japanese¹, a vanquished people, must now walk along a path that is full of pain and suffering. The reparations imposed by the Potsdam Declaration are a heavy burden. But this painful path² along which **we**¹ walk carrying **our**¹ burden — is it² not also the path of hope which gives to **us**⁴ sinner⁴ an opportunity to expiate **our**⁴ sins? (p. 109)

There are numerous examples of both anaphora (**it** refers back to painful path, **we** and **our** back to Japanese, and **our** back to sinner) and cataphora (**We** refers forward to Japanese and **us** forward to sinner). These cohesive devices help to distinguish and contrast, in very limited space, what the difficult postwar circumstances meant to Nagai's fellow parishioners as both citizens of a defeated country ("We Japanese") and as Christians who have transgressed God's laws ("us sinners").

2.1.2 Conjunction

Johnston also skillfully uses conjunction (italicized) to line-up the sequence of events crucial to Nagai's

premise that the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in general — only one city on a list of potential targets — and of Urakami Cathedral in particular was not at all coincidental but rather “some mysterious providence of God”:

... The second atomic bomb... was originally destined for another city. *But*,.... the American pilots found it impossible to aim at their targets. *Consequently*, they suddenly changed their plans *and* decided to drop the bomb on Nagasaki, the secondary target. *However*,.... cloud and wind carried it slightly north of the munitions factories over which it was supposed to explode *and* it exploded above the cathedral. (p. 107)

The lack of said conjunctions would result in a somewhat disparate sequence of events that reads more like a news report. Their relative abundance adds to the text's flow and helps to emphasize Nagai's intended point.

2.1.3 Lexical cohesion

Finally, there are also numerous instances of lexical cohesion, with repetition having the most significant impact. In the following, Johnston enumerates the various “sins” Nagai attributed to humanity (italics added):

... *We have* inherited the sin of Cain.... *We have* forgotten that we are children of God; *We have* believed in idols; *We have* disobeyed the law of love.... *We have* hated one another.... *We have* killed one another. And now at last, *we have* brought this great and evil war to an end.... (pp. 107-108)

The use of “we have” acts as an organizational marker / “bullet” letting the reader know that a continuing list of similar items is occurring and emphasizes and refers back to the collective fault of “the human family” (pp. 106, 107) oft mentioned by Nagai in his speech.

Johnston also utilizes a significant number of metaphors. For example, the decision to continue or desist in the war effort is referred to as a “crossroads” (p. 106), and “The reparations imposed by the Potsdam Declaration” are “a walk along a path that is full of pain and suffering” (p. 109) (see section 2.1.1). Such metaphors help form a “lexical chain” for “organizing relations” (Baker, 1992, p. 202) in the text.

In summary, based on an inspection of the TT alone, Johnston's text is a perfectly intelligible, coherent text. Such coherence constitutes one of its strengths. Of course, two of Nida's requirements for a good translation are “conveying the spirit and manner of the original” and “producing a similar response” (2000, p. 160). To determine Johnston's success in this department, a closer examination of the relationship between ST and TT will be necessary.

3. Comparative analysis of source text and target text

3.1 Equivalence

The ST and TT were compared to determine Johnston's equivalence strategy. His primary objective

appeared to be producing a dynamically equivalent translation, in which the translator is less concerned with matching the TT message to the ST message than aiming for a naturalness of expression in which the relationship between receptor and message is roughly the same as in the original context (Nida, 2000). Nevertheless, the presence of textually equivalent portions suggest that he did not pursue an entirely unbounded translation (i.e., one in which equivalence need not occur at the same level or rank but can occur at word, sentence, clause, or other level as well) (Catford, 1965).

The initial paragraph/*danraku* (p. 106) demonstrates that there is textual equivalence at roughly the sentence level, requiring significant translation shifts (Catford 1965) otherwise. Corresponding units of translation (UT) are listed in parentheses. The lack of a corresponding UT is indicated by an “X”.

(2) Shōwa nijūnen / (1) hachigatsu kokonoka / (3) gozen jūji sanjūppun koro / (5) daihonei ni oite / (4) sensō saikō shidō kaigi ga hirakare, / (7) kōfuku ka / (8) kōsen ka / (6) wo kettei suru / (X) koto ni narimashita.

(1) On August 9, / (2) 1945, / (3) at 10:30 A.M., / (4) a meeting of the Supreme Council of War was held / (5) at the Imperial Headquarters / (6) to determine / (7) whether Japan should capitulate / (8) or continue to wage war.

Apart from the sequence of elements, and accounting for the fact that the final unit (*koto ni narimashita*) is not translated directly, the first sentence from each are largely textually equivalent.

However, the very next ST sentence sees the lengthy initial dependent clause translated as two complete sentences (i.e., a unit shift). So begins a litany of translation shifts. Considering the overall characteristics of the respective texts (ST = 43 sentences, TT = 68 sentences), it is apparent that quite a few unit and structure shifts (among others) are required in the remainder of the passage as well.

These translation shifts provide evidence that, rather than following the structure of the ST rigidly (i.e., formal equivalence, Nida, 2000), Johnston appears to lean more towards attaining a dynamic equivalence in his translation. Of course, translation shifts aside, there are any number of substitutions and additions in the TT that would qualify as evidence of dynamic equivalence as well. However, closer examination of these changes suggests evidence of Johnston’s second underlying strategy, domestication, so it will thus be reserved for the next section.

3.2 Domestication vs. foreignization

3.2.1 Historical background

Even though there are trace elements of foreignization, Johnston’s translation is largely a case of domestication. However, it is necessary to first provide a measure of historical background to assist in the analysis. What were the particular circumstances surrounding Nagai’s text, and what did the world look like nearly forty years later when Johnston’s translation was published?

Nagasaki was a city with a long, rich Christian tradition (Dower, 1999), and the believers of Nagai’s time were proud of their lineage as descendants of martyrs (Miyamoto, 2005). The author himself was a convert to Catholicism (Nagai, 1949) as well as a respected doctor and parishioner (Miyamoto, 2005). Nagai was exposed to the atomic blast at a mere 700 meters from the hypocenter, and his wife was killed

in the explosion (Johnston, 1994, v).

The bomb exploded over "the largest Catholic Cathedral in the Far East" at the time (Lifton and Mitchell, 1995, p. 163), and Nagai counseled fellow anguished and bereaved Catholics in the community who were trying to make sense of what had happened. He did not consider the incident as a punishment from God as many of his fellow community members did (Miyamoto, 2005). His thoughts were encapsulated in this very passage chosen for analysis, delivered as a speech before the entire congregation at a Requiem Mass approximately three months after the bombing (Miyamoto, 2005).

The publication of *The Bells of Nagasaki* coincided with a significant nuclear moment in history. Spurred into action by U.S. President Ronald Reagan's continuing nuclear buildup (Lifton and Mitchell, 1995) and his administration's suggestion that nuclear war was not only survivable but potentially "winnable" (p. 262), the "nuclear freeze" movement came on the scene shortly after he first took office in 1981, ushering in a "proliferation of antinuclear activity" during his first term (Meyer, 1990, p. xiii).

The television broadcast of *The Day After* in 1983 — a fictional account of a Soviet nuclear attack against the U.S. — drew huge ratings (Lifton and Mitchell, 1995), and some experts feared that the public was being "besieged" with an unending stream of "prophecies magnifying or minimizing the possibility of nuclear wars" (Blackwell and Gessner, 1983, p. 237).

The translator himself summarized the global crisis in his introduction:

...As I write these words, fifteen thousand physicists from forty-three countries are appealing to the United Nations and to individual governments to halt the arms race. They cite the danger of a holocaust that could kill one hundred million people... that some fifty thousand nuclear weapons are currently deployed with a combined destructive power of one million times that of the bomb that wiped out Hiroshima... that a billion people could die before the mushroom cloud... even dissipates. (Johnston, 1984, xx)

Johnston, himself an ordained Jesuit priest known as an advocate for inter-religious dialogue, did not hide his admiration for Nagai's spirituality (Johnston, 1984, p. xx, xxii) either, and it is possible that the translator's religious background as well as the global climate at time of writing influenced his decision-making process.

3.2.2. Evidence of domestication

In this light, it is now possible to discuss in detail the various textual variations in Johnston's text. Johnston appears to eschew foreignization – the deliberate strategy of retaining the otherness of a ST (Venuti, 1998) in favor of domestication. It seems likely that he tailored his translation to meet the specific need of English-speaking readers — regardless of religious denomination — at the height of nuclear tensions in 1984.

There are a number of substitutions which make sense in this light, seemingly done to widen his audience. For example, Nagai referred to "the souls of 8,000 Catholic believers" (*katorikku shinja no reikon*) ascending to God, while Johnston's translation reads "eight thousand Christians" (1949, p. 106). Nagai's address was primarily addressing the Catholic community of Urakami, but using the word "Christians"

would allow more readers to identify with the victims and be impacted by the message. There are also passages in which Nagai specifically mentions Urakami Cathedral itself. Johnston often inserts “Nagasaki” instead; many non-Christians were surely killed on that day as well. The nuclear destruction of an entire city would undoubtedly serve as a greater warning to readers than would a single community of one denomination’s believers. An advocate for interfaith dialogue would also most likely be aware of the plurality of denominations in addition to Catholicism, and Johnston made a shrewd decision by making the language more inclusive. This kind of inclusive language is one of the translation’s greatest strengths, and it points firmly to a domesticating approach.

There are also a few instances where Johnston adjusts Nagai’s scriptural references to avoid confusion and alleviate the need for explanatory footnotes. For example, the act of eating fruit from the “tree of knowledge” (*chie no ki*), mentioned during the litany of offenses Nagai attributed to the wartime human race, would not be implicitly evil except to someone familiar with the account in Genesis Chapter 2 in which the act was expressly forbidden by God. By translating it simply as “the forbidden tree” (p. 107), Johnston deftly and economically makes his point clear while avoiding the need for any further explication, another example of domestication. This concision could be considered another of the text’s strengths.

Finally, his translation “tones-down” polite and honorific Japanese expressions that would seem peculiar or “foreign-sounding” to a modern English readership. As an example, there is *-tamau*, an honorific auxiliary verb used in classical Japanese (Wixted, 2006). In and of itself, the verb *kudasu* can easily be translated into English as “to issue” or “to hand down”. However, there is obviously no corresponding “auxiliary-verb-as-suffix” in English to indicate politeness, so instead of using hyperbole (“The Emperor, in his infinite mercy, graciously handed down the decree”), Johnston translated it simply as “made known” or “issue” (Nagai, 1949, pp. 107, 108). Such hyperbolic language may have indeed foreignized his translation, so Johnston’s treatment is yet another indicator of a domesticating translation contributing to a more readable text.

Of course, his translation is not entirely without foreignizing elements. For, instance, it might be argued that the text’s inclusion and direct translation of such strong religious symbolism and references throughout — “altar of sacrifice” (p. 107), “unblemished lamb” (p. 108) among others — is a foreignizing element to a casual or non-Christian reader. However, it could just as easily be argued that this is a case of domestication owing to the fact that the English-speaking world as a potential readership also contains a large number of Christians largely familiar with this kind of terminology.

Even though foreignizing elements do exist in Johnston’s translation, the sum total of textual evidence and historical circumstances at time of writing points largely to a domesticating translation.

4. Questionable decisions and potential weaknesses

There are also a few cases where substitutions or additions do not seem to make sense when examined in light of the translator’s strategies. In most cases, like when Adam “ate” the forbidden fruit (p. 107) but did not “steal” it (ST: *nusunda*), these choices do not significantly impact the TT. However, one questionable choice that seems to undermine the basic premise of Nagai’s speech — that God Himself is responsible for the sequence of events that led to the bomb being dropped — stands out.

It occurs right as Nagai begins to build his central case that the time and place of the atomic bomb were more than "merely coincidental" (p. 107). The translation begins the first phase of Nagai's argument with "I have heard..." accounting for *to iu hanashi wo kikimashita*, and lists the evidence. Strangely, at the end, the text includes a reiteration of hearsay (not present in the ST): "This is what I have heard." Its presence on two occasions in such close proximity seems to weaken Nagai's argument at a critical point in the text — tying together a string of historical events to demonstrate divine intervention is already a difficult enough task; Johnston's translation may have been better served without this insertion.

Though somewhat undermining Nagai's central argument at a crucial point in the text, the fact that the portion above is more or less an isolated incident limits its negative influence on the TT as a whole.

5. Conclusion

Johnston's "Funeral Address for the Victims of the Atomic Bomb" is a translation that strongly domesticates the source text, likely intended specifically to resonate with a readership in the midst of the geopolitical turmoil present at time of publication. Though there is enough textual equivalence present to discount it as an unbounded translation, Johnston's modus operandi was almost certainly that of achieving dynamic equivalence. The strengths of his translation lie in four main areas: (1) its readability, observable empirically through its use of cohesive devices; (2) its inclusive language that takes a message intended mainly for a relatively small group of Catholics and makes it relevant to a much wider audience; (3) the concision with which it handles religious terminology, alleviating the need for footnotes; and (4) its equitable treatment of polite Classical Japanese, which prevents the translation from "sounding foreign" to a modern day English-speaking audience. Despite one questionable decision, Johnston's text is a solid piece of translation. It merits reading even today, due not only to the weight of its message, but also because of the skill with which Johnston made a piece of text in a different language and culture relevant to an audience nearly forty years later.

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