

PREFACE

The volume *Toward a Science of Translating* has been used by more types of translators and for a longer period of time than either the author or the publisher contemplated, probably because so many of the illustrative examples came from field experience of trying to help translators in various areas of Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia. In fact, in terms of range of literary types, varieties of language, history of translating, and use by people in diverse cultures, Bible translating exceeds all other major classes of texts. Perhaps the most important aspect of the 1964 edition is the fact that it has proven to be exceptionally useful to translators working in many different families of languages and in radically diverse cultures.

Various aspects of *Toward a Science of Translating* have served as core concepts which have been expanded in three supplementary volumes: *The Theory and Practice of Translating* (1969) with Charles R. Taber, *From One Language to Another* with Jan de Waard (1986), and *Contexts in Translating* (2003).

There can never be a final and comprehensive volume on translating, because the range of linguistic problems, the varieties of text types, and the needs of special audiences are constantly changing. This volume does not, however, deal exclusively with present-day problems, but attempts to put translating into a context of historical changes in principles and procedures during the last two centuries.

Many readers of *Toward a Science of Translating* have assumed that I am essentially a Bible translator who became interested in linguistic theory. In reality, however, I was trained as a linguist and anthropologist. For this reason, I was asked by the Bible societies to find out why so many translations of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament are not only difficult to understand but are also frequently misunderstood.

My work during the last forty years has opened my eyes to a new world of language and religion, in which translators need to deal with the functions of mantras, expressions of religious rapture, the complexities of religious hierarchies, and especially those areas in which the language of religion is not the daily language of the people.

Translating is never an easy task because the cultural contexts that provide the meaning of words and texts are never the same. Even short-stories are often too short to provide the clues to unusual cultural values, for example, a story about South American Indians retreating from civilization and returning to the jungle. On the other hand, some texts are simply too long, especially when they seem to wither away toward the end, as in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Some Japanese poetry is magnificent in its original cultural context, but when

transported into another culture, it is too often awkwardly meaningless, precisely the reason why some translators have insisted that they will only translate texts that are culturally transmissible. And many legal documents can only make sense when translators provide directly or indirectly the cultural information that is indispensable for understanding the respective legal systems.

Expert translators are not only multilingual, but also multicultural.

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