

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Goal of this Study

The goal of this thesis is to compare five Farsi translations of Colossians 1:13-23 with the original Greek text in the light of a meaning-based translation approach to translation. Doing this will assess the accuracy, naturalness and clarity of the translations and give some objective measure of translation quality.

1.2 Background Information

There are many different language groups in Iran (77 language groups including 75 living languages and 2 languages that do not have any known speakers¹). Although Persian (Farsi) is the official language of Iran, many people are not able to speak, read, or write in the official language.

The Bible has been translated into only a few of the main languages of Iran, which means the members of most of the other language groups have to read the Bible in Farsi. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran (in 1979), Christian missionaries were expelled from the country. The government forbade churches from accepting “non-Christians” into the church. (Only those who are born in Christian families are considered to be Christian.) The church leaders were ordered to conduct services in their own languages (mainly Assyrian and Armenians). This meant the members of other language groups would not be able to understand the language even if they went to a Church. Selling of the Bible and other Christian literature was prohibited. All these restrictions have created a demand for Scripture. In addition, the fast growing number of unpublicized converts to Christianity in Iran has intensified this need for Scripture.

There are five Farsi translations of the Bible available for individual as well as community use. One is the Old Translation (the New Testament was published in 1812, and the Old Testament in 1845) which was published in 1846 as a complete Bible. This translation has been the main Bible used by individuals and communities. However, apart from being a literal translation, language change has

¹ http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=ir May 2, 2012.

made it increasingly difficult to understand this version. The Old Translation has also been the source of translation and teaching from Farsi into minority language groups in Iran.

To be able to assess the accuracy, naturalness and clarity of the translations, as well as to be able to estimate to what extent these translations are able to convey the meaning, this thesis compares these translations with the original Greek text in the light of the meaning-based approach which has been one of the most influential Bible translation theories during the last few decades.

This submission will highlight the difficulties in each translation and identify and investigate which of the five translations is the most reliable.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Research

The following hypotheses are put forward:

1. Any translation which is closer to the original Greek structure has more translation issues and as a result is more difficult to understand.
2. All five translations have failed to fully grasp some aspects of the meaning of the original text.
3. Farsi Contemporary Translation (FCT), which claims to use meaning-based translation theory, is closest to meeting the standard of meaning-based translation.

1.4 Methodology

To achieve the goal of this thesis, the following methodology is used:

1. Five Farsi translations of the Epistle to the Colossians (1:13-23) have been chosen. These translations are: 1. Old Translation (OTV), 2. Sharif Translation (SHT), 3. Farsi Contemporary Translation (FCT), 4. New Millennium Version (NMV) and 5. Pirouz Sayar Translation (PST).
2. A detailed exegetical investigation of Epistle to the Colossians (1:13-23) from the Greek has been carried out to make sure the text is fully understood. In the exegesis section, some translation suggestions have been suggested to help clarify the way it should be translated in Farsi. Finally, an expanded exegesis of each verse is provided².

² Much of the expanded exegesis comes from "Translator's Notes on Colossians help on understanding and translating Paul's letter to the Colossians" Gray, Sharon (Ed.)

3. Each Farsi translation has been compared with the exegesis provided for the Greek, looking for incorrect renderings of the meaning of the original into Farsi.
4. Each translation has been compared to the standards of meaning-based translation. A table indicating the translation issues and the number of their occurrences in each verse of each Farsi Bible has been provided.
5. Improvements have been suggested in translating the passage. This is done in the form of best translation suggestions.

1.4.1 Back-translation

Back-translations were done as literal translations keeping close to the meaning and structure of the Farsi text with some minor adjustments to make it readable and understandable for English readers. For example in Farsi, an SOV language, the verb is placed at the end of the sentence, while English is SVO. As a result, some adjustments had to be made. Also at times, when an expression was not natural in Farsi, efforts were made to keep it close to the Farsi structure so that an English reader could recognize the unnaturalness of the structure.

1.4.2 Interlinear

The grammatical information of the Greek interlinear text has been removed as it did not have much use in this research. But the grammatical information is made available in the appendix section.

Farsi is an SOV language with a Perso-Arabic script³ which reads from right to left. Farsi has complex morphology especially on the verb, most of which appear in the form of suffixes, and a small number in the form of prefixes. This complex morphology helps the verb to express tense and aspect, as well as mark the agreement of the verb with the subject in person and number. There is no grammatical gender in Farsi.

Farsi grammatical information has not been presented in this thesis because almost none of the translation issues raised were affected by the presence or absence of such grammatical morphemes. A more “English” word form of glossing has been presented that makes the interlinear more accessible to a wider audience.

³ Perso-Arabic is a writing system based on the Arabic script. The Arabic alphabet was adapted to the Persian language adding four letters of پ [p], ت [t], ژ [z], and گ [g] which do not exist in Arabic.