The Limits of Fidelity: Rhetorical Uses of *exprimere* by Latin Literary Translators

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Because ancient translation has neither an explicit *technē* nor copious exempla from which to infer theoretical framework, I argue that we must use vocabulary cautiously in reconstructing ancient attitudes towards translation, especially since ancient authors frequently have ulterior motives in using terms like *vertere*, *transferre*, and *exprimere*. This paper focuses on the last of these, *exprimere*, and reevaluates its meaning by considering the broader literary purposes of the works in which it appears. Richter (1938), Reiff (1959), and Traina (1970 & 1989) have each tried to establish precise definitions for individual terms for translation in antiquity, but while their work has been valuable, none of them has acknowledged the wide gap between what translators do and what they say they do. This paper revises and augments their conclusions about *exprimere* by introducing a more nuanced approach that takes into account the rhetorical functions of ancient translation terms.

The word *exprimere* frequently suggests literal translation, as implied by its primary meaning, "to press (as of a seal)." At *De Legibus* 2.64, Cicero claims that a law prohibiting excessive mourning in the 12 Tables was translated (*expressa*) from Solon's laws and, while the original is lost, we can infer from Plutarch's description of it that the translation is probably highly faithful, if not literal. At *De Re Publica* 1.65, Scipio translates (*exprimere*) a passage from Plato's *Republic* and Laelius proclaims that the translation is a success (*prorsus expressa sunt*, 1.68). An analysis of the passage reveals, however, that Scipio produces only a close paraphrase. I argue that Scipio's apparent claim to translate Plato literally aims to lend gravity to his own argument by appropriating an established authority as evidence, while in practice he decontextualizes and modifies Plato so that the Greek original more fully fits Scipio's Roman context. Finally, the speaker of Catullus 65 sends Hortensius a translation (*expressa*, 16) of Callimachus, apologizing that he could not manage original poetry and suggesting that his gift is a mere mechanical rendering. Examination of the context of poem 65, however, reveals that this self-deprecatory statement is as ironic as that in other Catullan poems, e.g. 1 and 49, since the speaker's apology for being unable to write original poetry is framed within an original poem. In addition, an analysis of poem 66 against its Greek original reveals that it is as much a personalized appropriation of Hellenistic sources as any other allusive poem in Catullus, and therefore the claim to literal translation is subtly humorous.

These rhetorically-charged instances of *exprimere* are not isolated, nor is this the only term to be used misleadingly. This paper provides a methodology for integrating the generic and personal rhetorical factors that alter the meanings of these words and reveals that ancient authors had a complex understanding of translation's directive potential.

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