

Verborum Ordo

A Typological Approach to Word-Order Literalism as an Indication of Saint Jerome's Translation Technique in the Vulgate

Despite the important role played by St. Jerome (331-420) in the history of translation, his own translations have suffered some neglect when it comes to detailed investigations of his theory and praxis. In particular, the distinction he espoused between his ordinary sense-for-sense mode of translating and the more literal mode he used when translating the Holy Scriptures – “where even the order of the words is a mystery” (Epistle 57.5.2; ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est) – has been overlooked or even denied by some scholars, often with the assumption that all of his translations were produced in a more or less sense-for-sense manner.

Taking as a basis the relative independence of the criteria by which a translation may be considered literal, this study examines the single parameter of word order (highlighted by Jerome himself) through a broadly typological and even statistical approach, in order to test the thesis that within St. Jerome's oeuvre, Scripture translation, as a genre, licenses different rules of language usage. The demonstration of a word-order literalism which employs an over-abundance of marked syntactic patterns in Jerome's translations of selected Old Testament books gives an indication of one aspect of his translation technique in the Vulgate.

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