

**THOMAS MORE'S VIEWS ON
LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION
AND THEIR PLACE IN THE CLASSICAL AND
HUMANIST TRADITION**

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Critics have accorded More a place in the development of English prose, praised various aspects of both his English and Latin, and discussed his abilities as a translator. However, they have paid less heed to his many comments on language and translation scattered throughout his works. These concern such varied topics as grammar, common usage, stylistics, etymology, and translation practices, all of which must be governed by the principle of decorum. More's treatment of these questions stands squarely in the tradition of Cicero, Horace, Quintilian and St Jerome but it also represents both the humanists' interpretations of these authors and their own comments on language and translation.

Key-words: grammar, semantics, lexicon, stylistics, translating practices, decorum.

Les spécialistes de More ont accordé à celui-ci une place dans l'évolution de la prose anglaise, ils ont loué plusieurs aspects de son style d'écriture en anglais comme en latin, et commenté ses compétences de traducteur. Par contre, les nombreux commentaires sur la langue et la traduction dont il a étayé ses écrits ont attiré beaucoup moins d'attention. Ils s'adressent pourtant à une grande variété de sujets: la grammaire, l'usage commun, la stylistique, l'étymologie et les pratiques traductionnelles, autant de sujets qui, d'après lui, doivent être guidés par le principe du decorum. Dans sa façon de traiter ces questions, More se place résolument dans la tradition de Cicéron, d'Horace, de Quintilien et de St-Jérôme, mais en même temps, il représente tant l'interprétation des humanistes de ces auteurs classiques que leurs propres commentaires sur la langue et la traduction.

Los especialistas han señalado la contribución de Moro en la evolución de la prosa inglesa, han elogiado los diferentes aspectos de su escritura en inglés y en latín y han comentado sus habilidades como traductor. En cambio, le prestaron muy poca atención a los numerosos comentarios que hizo sobre la lengua y la traducción diseminados en sus escritos y que tratan de una gran variedad de temas: gramática, uso, estilística, etimología, práctica de la traducción, temas, que según Moro, deben estar guiados por el principio del decoro. El trato que le da Moro a estos temas lo coloca claramente en la tradición de Cicerón, Horacio, Quintiliano y San Jerónimo, y al mismo tiempo, representa tanto la interpretación que hacen los humanistas de estos autores clásicos como sus propios comentarios sobre la lengua y la traducción.

Palabras clave: gramática, semántica, léxico, estilística, práctica de la traducción, decoro.

Thomas More's place in the history of the English language and of English prose was first fully established by R. W. Chambers in 1932,¹ although his qualities as a fine prose-writer and stylist had always been recognised.² So, too, various aspects of his style in both English and Latin have been studied.³ Editors of the Yale Complete Works have over the years provided much valuable and detailed

¹ Chambers discusses nineteenth- and twentieth-century views on More as "father of English prose" in a spirited defence of his "eloquent, dramatic, varied" and "effective" writing and its place in the history of English prose. R. W. Chambers, *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More* by Nicholas Harpsfield, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, EETS. o.s. CLXXXVII (London: 1932), lii-clxvii.

² As early as 1552, Ascham had praised More's English writing and his respect of linguistic decorum in "A Report and Discourse (...) of affairs (...) of Germany" in *The Whole Works of Roger Ascham, now first collected and revised, with a Life of the Author*, ed. The Rev. Dr. Giles, 3 vols. (London: 1864-65), Vol III, 1-62. Nashe states that Chaucer, More and Sidney had "cleared the language from barbarism" (*Pierce Penillessé*, I, 193). Rastell, in his introduction to the *English Workes* (London: 1557), praised his uncle's English and recommended his writings to "everye Englishman that is studious or desirous to know and lerne, not merely the eloquence and propertie of the English tong, but also the true doctrine of Christen Catholicke fayth."

³ Joseph Delcourt's *Essai sur la langue de Sir Thomas More d'après ses œuvres anglaises* (Paris: Didier, 1914), seeks to establish how "modern" More's English was. Veré L. Rubel discusses More's creation of neologisms and decorum in terms of diction in *Poetic Diction in the English Renaissance from Skelton through Spenser* (New York and London: Oxford UP, 1951), 3 and 111-112. F. Th. Visser examines More's English syntax, especially the verb, in *A Syntax of the English Language of St. Thomas More*, 3 vols. (Louvain: C. Uystpruyt, 1946-56; repr. Vaduz: Kraus Reprints, 1963). Various features of More's Latin are discussed by Raymond Monsuez in "Le latin de Thomas More dans l'*Utopia*," *Caliban* 3, 35-78, while Edward Surtz, in Appendix B to his edition of the *Utopia*, discusses More's vocabulary and diction in that work. *Utopia*. Vol 4 of the *Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1965), 579-82. All references to More's writings are to the Yale *Complete Works*.

commentary on individual works, while they and others have discussed More's abilities as a translator.⁴ Yet less attention has been paid to what More himself says about language and translating. William Nelson's "Thomas More, Grammarian and Orator" is less an examination of More's opinions on grammar and rhetoric than a biographical study describing More's competence in these subjects and its role in shaping his career in court.⁵ On the other hand, Daniel Kinney, in his introduction to the *Letter to Dorp* (CW15, xix-cxviii), does discuss More's treatment of one aspect of language, namely his critique of Scholastic grammar and dialectic.⁶ Kinney argues persuasively that in this letter, More "helps to lay the foundation (...) for a genuine, especially humanist 'science of discourse' that, amongst other things, challenges and discredits Scholastic conceptions of how language works" (lxv). Although thorough in its investigation of More's opinions as expressed in the *Letter to Dorp*, Kinney's Introduction is nevertheless limited to this one text. To date, however, it is the only full-length study of More's views on language. Perhaps this is because More, unlike Valla, Erasmus and many other humanists, wrote no extended discussion of language other than the *Letter to Dorp*, no lengthy defence of the vernacular, no learned disquisition on eloquence, no treatise on translation, and no

⁴ On More as a translator, see especially Germain Marc'hadour, Chapter XIV of *Thomas More et la Bible: La place des livres saints dans son apologétique et sa spiritualité* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1969); Max Kullnick, "Thomas Morus: Picus Erle of Mirandula," *Archiv für das Studium des neuen Sprachen und Literaturen*, N. S. XXI (1908), 47-75 and XXII (1909), 27-50; Heinz Holeczek, *Humanistische Bibelphilologie als Reformproblem bei Erasmus von Rotterdam, Thomas More und William Tyndale* (Leiden: 1975); Alain Jolidon in *Thomas More 1477-1977* (Brussels: Aloïs Gerlo, 1980), 39-89; and Erika Rummel, who compares Erasmus' and More's translations of Lucian in *Erasmus as Translator of the Classics* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985), 49-69.

⁵ William Nelson, "Thomas More, Grammarian and Orator" in *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. R. S. Sylvester and G. P. Marc'hadour (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), 150-60.

⁶ This part of Kinney's introduction is an expansion of his earlier "More's *Letter to Dorp*: Remapping the Trivium," *Renaissance Quarterly* 34 (1981): 179-210. In my discussion of More's text I am heavily indebted to his analysis and comments.

educational tract on language learning and composition. He nevertheless frequently raised questions relating to all these topics in his writings. Linguistic comments are in fact scattered throughout his works and correspondence and are many and wide-ranging. Yet no attempt has been made to assemble these, relating them when appropriate to what More says in his early *Letter to Dorp*, and situating them in a wider context of classical and humanist writings on language and translation. This the present article proposes to remedy. After first discussing the *Letter to Dorp*, we shall seek to demonstrate that, crucial to More's thoughts on language as expressed elsewhere in his writings are: the principle of decorum as discussed by Horace and Quintilian; the ideals of eloquence and "polished speech" set forth by Classical authors and prized by humanists like Valla and Erasmus; the principle of common usage, again found in Horace but also in Quintilian and Valla; the role of the vernacular as set forth by earlier humanist writers; and the rules of text- and audience-appropriateness in translating, a question raised by Cicero, Horace and St. Jerome.

Any discussion of More's views on language must take as its starting point the *Letter to Dorp*, composed in 1515. There, More advanced his belief that, in Kinney's words, "temporal language (...) has its origin in temporal *utilitas*, not in some unearthly fixed correlation of things and our signs for them" (CW15, lix). The Scholastics, who with Dorp are the object of More's criticism, conceived of language as a means of finding fixed correspondences between spiritual and material realities. Their epistemological theory asserted that through language, which functioned as a mirror reflecting the reality of physical phenomena, we could express our experience of objects external to us but not before conceptualizing them. Hence their strict distinction between the thing signified and the signifier, a distinction that More, together with the other humanists, felt to be invalid because, being abstract and the result of speculative reasoning, it ignored both common sense (*ratio*) and common usage (*consuetudo*). Both of these Quintilian, in his *Institutio oratoria*, which is of crucial importance in humanist views on language, had placed alongside long use (*vetustas*) and authority (*auctoritas*) as the basic building blocks of discourse, calling common usage "the sweet

pilot in speaking" and defining it as the "agreed practice of educated men" (I.vi.1).

The Scholastics had divided language study into the three disciplines of logic, grammar and rhetoric but had raised logic, or dialectic, to the pinnacle of the triad. As a result, More continues, they had created arbitrary dialectical distinctions between modes of signifying, preferring these to judgements based on common sense.⁷ He challenges their system of dictating standards of *proprietas* based not on empirical evidence but on rigorous and arbitrary application of meanings to words, and accuses them of unduly focussing on linguistic structures in order to extract these meanings.⁸ Meaning must be determined by reason not rule (36/10-11) and by the precepts of reason, or common sense, working together with propriety (*proprietas*), while both must be based on the general meaning, the *sensus communis*, that usage gives a word.

In terms of grammar, the Scholastics' methods had resulted in the fabrication of complex rules based on "some sort of logic or metaphysics," not on the observation of actual usage (26/16-18). Yet, says More, in the study of grammar it should be enough to learn empirical precepts which will enable you to speak a language, in this case, Latin (24/21-22). It should invent "no laws of speech in defiance of custom; instead, it simply sees which constructions appear the most often in speech and points these out to those who are unschooled in speech so that their speech will not flout common usage" (34/11-14). More reduces grammar to its purely utilitarian function: "grammar teaches correct speech" [*grammatica recte loqui docet*], which is based on the observation of how people speak, and it

⁷ For a very useful discussion of medieval and post-medieval concepts of signification, see Chapters I and II of E. J. Ashworth's *Language and Logic in the Post-Medieval Period* (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel, 1974) and article "Chimeras and Imaginary Objects: A Study in the Post-Medieval Theory of Signification" in her *Studies in Post-Medieval Semantics* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 57-77.

⁸ Similar issues in Erasmus' linguistic theory and practice are discussed by Mary Jane Barnett, "Erasmus and the Hermeneutics of Linguistic Praxis," *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (1996): 542-73.

advises people who do not express themselves properly “not to violate ordinary usage” [*morem loquantur*]. In this, he was no doubt influenced by Quintilian, who said “grammar, the science of letters, must know its own limits (...) it has usurped practically all the highest departments of knowledge” (II.1.4-8). But he was also echoing contemporary humanist thinkers, who by emphasizing rhetoric rather than logic, defined grammar as the art of writing and speaking correctly, to be determined on the basis of usage, reason and authority. More’s concept of grammar is therefore well within the mainstream of Classical and humanist thought, and as such is just the opposite of that of the Scholastics.

Although he criticizes the pre-eminence they gave to grammar, More maintains its importance in the trivium and even presents his ideal humanist as a *grammaticus*, based again on Classical and earlier humanist models: he is “a ‘man of letters’ whose area of study extends across every variety of literature, that is, every discipline” (12/19-20). Grammar nevertheless has to share its place in More’s paradigm with rhetoric, which the Scholastics had coupled with grammar only to make both subordinate to dialectic. They had distrusted it because they feared it would result in the signifier becoming more important than the thing signified. This same distrust led them—and Dorp—to discredit eloquence. More, on the contrary, places rhetoric, based as he says on secular custom, at the apex of the dialectic-grammar-rhetoric triad, making it, in Kinney’s words, “a new governing science” (lxvi). In so doing, he was undoubtedly indebted to Valla, who had redefined rhetoric as “a comprehensive science of all teaching and study of all modalities of language.”⁹ Furthermore, More accepts as part of rhetoric, eloquence, which for him goes beyond a mere preoccupation with words to embrace the

⁹ On the relationship between Valla and More see Salvatore I. Camporeale “Da Lorenzo Valla a Tommaso Moro: il statuto umanistico della teologia,” *Memorie domenicane*, New Series, 4 (1973): 9-102. Camporeale’s focus, however, is not on language *per se* but on comparing the relationship between grammar and theology in Valla and More. On the importance of Valla’s views on language see Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), Chapter 3.

questions of improving listeners’ minds and moving them to virtue.¹⁰ Eloquence (*eloquentia*) is after all an essential quality for the orator, who is described by Cicero in *De oratore* in very similar terms to the *grammaticus*: “a man who has obtained knowledge of all major subjects and arts” (*De oratore* I.vi.20). According to More, two other factors, both related to rhetoric, are essential to understanding language: what we would today call an historical linguistics approach, or the study of linguistic change over a given period of time, and what we would call a discourse analysis or pragmatics approach, the study of the affective and performative elements of language. Concerning the latter, he shared Erasmus’ belief that the element in language to be emphasized is performance, not abstract notions and arbitrary rules.

To sum up what More says about language in the first part of the *Letter to Dorp* (the second part is devoted to biblical philology and exegesis), rhetoric and grammar must together form the foundation for any theory of language. Basing his arguments on Classical authors like Cicero and Quintilian, and echoing earlier humanists like Valla, who had also attacked the Scholastics’ fundamental linguistic principles, More draws up an explanation of language of which *consuetudo* (common usage) and *ratio* (common sense) become the cornerstones. Abstract and quibbling discussions of fine grammatical points subordinated to logic rather than a pragmatic description of grammar that teaches people how to write and speak a language properly incur More’s anger and scorn. These same feelings are found in fictive mode in his *Utopia*, written mostly in the same autumn and published one year later. There Hythloday compares the learned men of Utopia, who had great knowledge of grammar and dialectics, with

¹⁰ The connection between eloquence, knowledge and virtue is also seen in two of the *parerga* accompanying the *Utopia*. Gerhard Geldenhauer of Nijmegen tells the reader that by reading the book, “you may polish your expression and improve your mind” [*linguam exornes... doceas animum*] and he calls More “eloquent” [*disertus*] (CW4, 30/5-7). Peter Giles, in his dedicatory letter to Busleyden, bases his argument that the *Utopia* is superior to Plato’s *Republic* partly on the fact that it was written by a “man of great eloquence” [*ab homine facundissimo*] (CW4, 22/19-20) whose discourse demonstrates “force and fluency” and a “command of pure Latin style” [*an orationis uim ac facultatem, qua tanta sermonis latini puritate*] (CW4, 22/12-13).

those of Europe; the former, he says ironically, could not compete with “our modern logicians,” for they know nothing of the rules pertaining to the properties of terms as taught in the *Parva logicalia*, the medieval textbook of logic on whose name More puns as meaning “little logic” (*CW4*, 158/20-28). The distrust of Scholastic grammar and playing down of the importance of grammar in general, the belief in the importance of mastering the Greek language, and finally the humanist precept that one learns languages through authors rather than grammars and lexicons, More had pointed out in the *Letter to Dorp* (68/17-25), are all demonstrated in the books Hythloday chooses to take to the Utopians. Of seventeen authors represented, only one is a grammarian, but he is neither Alexander de Villa nor Albertus, the Scholastic grammarians More reviled in his *Letter to Dorp*. Nor is he Varro or Aristarchus, classical grammarians More praises in the same text. Rather, Hythloday’s man is a humanist grammarian of Greek, Constantine Lascaris. Surtz queries the preference given to Lascaris over his more famous contemporary Theodore of Gaza, who according to Erasmus was the superior grammarian of the two (180/33). We might add that it appears at first sight even stranger given that Theodore was published by the Aldine Press during Linacre’s stay in Venice in 1495 and it was Linacre who taught More Greek. However, Hythloday is not More. His rather surprising choice of grammarian is perhaps meant to reflect his occasional lapse of judgement. The only other linguist represented among his authors is Hesychius, an Alexandrian lexicographer whose work was valuable for representing vocabulary and meanings found in various Greek dialects.¹¹

More never returned to elaborating a theory of language as he had begun to do in the *Letter to Dorp*. However, as we said in the introduction, he frequently brought up questions touching on diverse practical aspects of language use. One of these is the principle of decorum, or appropriateness, which comes up over and over again in

¹¹ The other “dictionary” that Hythloday chooses is in fact a “pharmacopoeia” listing medicinal plants and drugs, written by a physician of the first century A.D., Dioscorides.

his various writings and which figured prominently in the humanists’ discussions of language.

In Book I of *Utopia*, More-the-persona replies to the assertion that “there is no room for philosophizing with rulers” by drawing a comparison between “academic philosophy,” which thinks that everything is suitable to every place, and “another philosophy, more practical for the statesman, which knows its stage, adapts itself to the play in hand, and performs its role neatly and appropriately [*cum decoro*]” (99/11-14). The statesman unable to adapt to a given situation and offer appropriate advice is like the actor who comes on stage reciting something inappropriate [*aliena*] which will result in a “hodgpodge of comedy and tragedy.” Would it not, More asks, have been preferable to “take a part without words”? (99/22-25). Silence, then, is better than speech if language is being used inappropriately.

This belief that one must adapt linguistically to a given situation and use appropriate discourse in both oral and written composition is crucial to More’s views on language. As a general principle of linguistic and literary decorum, it lay at the heart of Horace’s *Ars poetica*; in its application to language, it was more fully discussed by Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria*. The humanists made it the central concept of rhetoric. Similarly, it governed More’s attitude towards language, for he extended it to stylistic, semantic and grammatical concerns, and even to basic translating practices. At the same time, it influenced his own writings, including his polemic works, which modern readers find disturbing precisely on account of their seeming lack of decorum, a subject that will be dealt with later in this article.

In his Letter to Giles, prefixed to the *Utopia*, More sets out the three stages of the rhetorical process involved in writing and oratory: he says he is grateful that he was relieved of the “labor of gathering materials for the work,” which is the first stage, *inventio*; that he had not had to “arrange” them, which is the second, *dispositio*; and there was no point in taking trouble to make the text “eloquent,” which is the third, *elocutio*. This is because Raphael’s language “could not be

polished” because it was “hurried and impromptu,” and of course the product of someone who knew more Greek than Latin. But important for the question of linguistic appropriateness of style is the next comment: “the nearer my style came to his careless simplicity the closer it would be to the truth” (39/5-10). More is grateful that he was not called upon to report the narrative “not only accurately but eloquently” because he could never have done so; all he had to do was “write out simply what I had heard” (38/11-26). These “modest” comments are of course ironical, for several reasons. First, beneath the supposedly artless text of More-the-reporter lies the highly polished, extremely eloquent and anything but careless and simple creation of More-the-author. Secondly, the relinquishing of *elocutio* to a third position of no concern runs counter to the humanists’ preoccupation with eloquence as a central issue. Their belief that eloquence was inevitably linked to virtue was rooted in Cicero and reinforced by Quintilian. It had been reiterated by St. Augustine in Book IV of *De doctrina christiana* where, although borrowing heavily from Cicero, he emphasizes the specific qualities of Christian versus pagan eloquence and states unequivocally that eloquence must go hand in hand with good behaviour; words must match deeds (XXIX, 62). Petrarch, Bonni and Valla had all pursued the idea further in their attempt to link style and thought, utterance and matter. Erasmus, too, espoused the view, expressing it in the old saying, “style is to the thought as clothing is to the body.” Thirdly, the equation of “careless simplicity” [*neglectam simplicitatem*] with truth is particularly ironic. It raises the whole issue of the appropriate language of poetry, of that which is feigned.¹² But, more important for the immediate context, it overlooks the fact that the “truth” we are about to hear is of course fiction. The modest comments also point up the question of stylistic decorum: the written style of the narrative must be appropriate to the character of the speaker or, as Horace says in the *Ars poetica*, “the words one utters must not be ill-suited” (104-5). This is why More

¹² Poesy as fable, fiction and lies, is addressed at some length in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* and brought up again in the *Apology and Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, although the appropriateness of poetic language *per se* is not discussed in them.

claims he had to match Hythloday’s style of “careless simplicity.” As for his comment that Hythloday’s “impromptu” [*extemporalis*] and hurried speech needed no polishing but only a style of “careless simplicity” [*neglectam simplicitatem*], that too is ironic. Quintilian had used those very words—*extemporalis* and *neglectus*—in stressing the need for even an “impromptu” speaker never to be “careless” about language, for spoken and written discourse are closely related. Rather, an impromptu speaker had to have studied well beforehand in order not to seem “careless” (*Institutio oratoria*, X.vii.28 and X.vii.1). No doubt More-the-lawyer would have concurred with this.¹³

Now, that More prized eloquence and “polished speech” is clear from comments he makes in various writings. In so doing, he stands squarely in the camp of the humanists, for whom eloquence was accorded the highest value in linguistic discussion.¹⁴ In the *Utopia*, Hythloday tells us that the speech of Morton, whom More had served when young, was “politus” [polished] and “efficax,” a term used by Quintilian to mean “effectual” (58-28). In his *Letter to a Monk*, More argues that eloquence—of which the monk is accusing Erasmus—is not an obstacle to lucidity in writing but rather the contrary. He states that “one of the cardinal precepts of rhetoric is that we should express ourselves clearly” (*CW*15, 223). Indeed, Aristotle says as much in his *Rhetoric* (III.2) and *Poetics* (XXII), as do Cicero in *De oratore* (III, 53-55) and Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria* (VIII.i.2.), and it was what the humanists believed. In a very different context, More praises his children on several occasions for their “elegant letters” [*elegantēs epistolae*], noting their tutor’s reports on the eloquence and sharpness of their essays. Again, in so doing he aligns himself with his fellow humanists, who placed eloquence at the

¹³ Erasmus, writing to Ulrich von Hutten in July 1519, paints a portrait of More in which he says that someone who spoke more felicitously would be hard to find, so fertile, he adds, are his mind and the tongue which obeys it (*Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*. 11 vols. Ed. P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and H. W. Garrod (Oxford: U of Oxford P, 1906-58). Letter No. 999, 262-63).

¹⁴ For a discussion of the importance of eloquence in humanist thought see Hanna H. Gray, “Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence” in *Renaissance Essays*. Ed. Paul O. Kristeller and Philip P. Weiner (New York: 1968), 199-216.

heart of their educational programmes.¹⁵ He says he is pleased the children have learned to write with eloquence and grace.¹⁶ Twice Margaret comes in for particular praise for her Latin style, her elegance and her polished letter writing.¹⁷ However, John is “especially congratulated” because not only does he set out his matter “agreeably,” compose it in “fairly polished language” and turn a joke on his father, he does so “not inappropriately.”¹⁸ This necessary combination of eloquence and appropriateness had appeared six years before in the Letter to Giles, where Giles is said to be “polished or elegant in speech and witty but without offence” [*sermone tam lepidus, & tam innoxie facetus*] (48/10-11). Eloquence, then, is not all.

Stylistic decorum is also dictated by the nature of one’s audience. One adapts one’s materials, as More says in his stage metaphor, to the matter at hand and to one’s listeners. The need to respect linguistic decorum appears once more garbed in a theatre metaphor in More’s 1520 letter to Erasmus concerning Brixius’ criticism of his dialogue between a friar and a jester in Book I of the *Utopia*. While not pretending his style is “Plautian Latin,” More nevertheless feels he is but following Plautus’ precedent of having people speak “in character.” As a Carthaginian speaks Punic in *Poenulus*, so More says his friar may, “with no breach of decorum,” speak “Latino-barbarian.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Thomas Elyot, for example, in his 1531 *Boke named the Governour*, stresses the need for boys to learn to express themselves both eloquently and elegantly in Latin and Greek. See *The boke named the Governour* (2 vols.) Ed. H. H. S. Croft (New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), 54. Ascham and Vives express similar views.

¹⁶ Letter to his daughters and to Margaret Giggs (1517) in E. F. Rogers, *The Correspondence of Thomas More* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1947), 97-98.

¹⁷ Letter to his most sweet Daughter, Margaret (1521?) in Rogers, 254-55 and Letter to his dearest Daughter, Margaret (1522?), Rogers, 257.

¹⁸ Thomas More to his Dearest Children and to Margaret Giggs, whom he numbers among his Children (1522), Rogers, 256.

¹⁹ Letter to Erasmus (1520?), Rogers, 87.

The relationship between stylistic decorum and audience appropriateness is addressed in several of the polemical works. Both *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer* and *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* constitute More’s response to Bishop Tunstal’s commission to write polemical books in the vernacular for the ordinary people of England that would help them “see through” the heresy that was threatening their country. These works are therefore written in the appropriate language—English. Gone is the clever and elegant Latin of *Utopia*, written for an international humanist audience. More adopts racy and colloquial language but a relatively “plain” style, unadorned by either Classical allusion or legal terminology, but rich in proverbial wisdom, images drawn from everyday life, snatches of low comedy, jest, and tales.²⁰ All these would be both familiar and comprehensible to More’s “sely symple soules,” as he calls them in his Preface to the *Confutation* (3/7). In his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More-the-interlocutor refers us several times to the principle of audience appropriateness. Speaking of the clergy studying the Bible and “showing” things to the unlettered, for example, he says their “sermon [must be] so tempered/as be mete and conuenient [appropriate] always for the present audyence” (CW6, 336/34-35). The preacher must “vse dyscrecyon in his prechyng (...) and have a respecte vnto the qualytees and capacityes of his audyence” (339/25-27). Earlier he had pondered, not whether to report a narrative eloquently, as More-the-persona had in *Utopia*, but whether to report it at all: “I stode,” he says, “halfe in a doubte whyther it were conuenient to reherse the wordes of any man so homly” as the young student who had presented such heretical views (23/13-14).

The final aspect of stylistic decorum broached by More concerns appropriateness of style to genre. In the *Utopia*, More criticizes the mixing of comedy and tragedy. Yet he was himself accused more than once of mixing seriousness and humour in a manner inappropriate to the work in hand. He addresses the question

²⁰ Louis A. Schuster points out that, in order to understand More’s polemical techniques, we must approach the controversial writings from the perspective of audience orientation (CW8, pt. 3, 1265).

in humorous mode in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, where More-the-interlocutor worries about the Messenger and the account of his dialogue with him, for he had “mengled” certain tales and jests with his theology. Yet, More-the-interlocutor continues, “in [this] I sawe no harme/yet somewhat doubted I lest they shold vnto sad men seme ouer lyght and wanton for the weyght and grauyte of suche an ernest matter” (23/16-21). A similar self-defence is made in the *Apology* (CW9, 170/30-171/4). There, responding to accusations made by “the brethren” (Protestants), More calls upon Horace’s oft-quoted dictum, but which he found in Chaucer, “a man maye som tyme saye full soth in game,” to explain why he brings “in amonge the moste ernest maters, fansyes and sportes, and mery tales.” He adds mischievously that, as a layman, he had rather “merryly to tell hys mynde, than seryously and solempenely to preache” (194). His defence of the use of all sorts of humour to persuade rested, of course, on Classical texts. Both Cicero in the *De oratore* (II.217-232) and Quintilian in the *Institutio oratoria* (VI.iii.7-12) devote long passages to this very discussion and address the specific question of appropriate humour.

One might expect that decorum dictate a different style in More’s devotional works. Such is not the case. He addresses the question of the appropriateness of humour in both the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* and the *De tristitia Christi*. Although the *Dialogue* is very different in subject, genre and tone from the controversial writings, and written for a different audience, More defends the use of a “low” style that permits merry tales, proverbs and jokes. They “temper” the “meat” and “medicine” of Antony’s arguments, making them more palatable for Vincent. Indeed, Vincent even quotes Thomas Aquinas in defending them: “proper plesaunt talkyng which is callid εὐτραπέλεια [wittiness].” Continuing, he says that wittiness is “a good vertew, servyng to refresh the mynd & make it quikke & lusty to labour & to study agayne” (82/18-20). Antony agrees but cautions that although “a folish mery tale” will refresh the mind (84/21), mirth and recreation must not be inappropriately long or important. Let them, he says, “serue vs but for sawce & make them not our meate” (82/25-6). Again, moderation is all.

Occasional appeals to humour constitute no more a breach of stylistic decorum than does the figure of irony in Scripture, as More argues in his last work, the *De Tristitia Christi*. There he defends irony as appropriate even in the account of Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. As Clarence Miller points out, he is following Erasmus in interpreting Jesus’ permission to the Apostles to “sleep on now... and take your rest” [*Dormite... iam et requiescite*] (289/6-7) as ironic, a figure of wit of the “serious kind,” perfectly suitable for the account of his imminent capture (289). More himself refers to the “holy and learned men” concerning the figure of irony in Scripture. Some are shocked by it because they are “not sufficiently versed in figures of speech which sacred Scripture customarily takes over from common speech” [*in loquendi figuris quas e uulgari sermone sumptas habet in usu scriptura sacra/non satis exercitati*] (293/7-9), or because they refuse to accept that the Scriptures could contain “these universally used forms of speech” [*usitatas illas passim loquendi formas*] (295/9-10). The sentiment perhaps echoes the spirited defence More had made in several previous writings of common usage, which will be discussed later in this article. Meanwhile, he carries the question of the appropriateness further. Jesus, he says, aroused the sleeping apostles with the right kind of irony for the occasion: “not indeed that trivial and sportive variety” [*leuicola et iocosa*] with which idle men of wit [*homines dicaces et iocosi*] are accustomed to amuse themselves, but rather a “serious and weighty [*seria grauique*] kind of irony” (289/5-8). The verb More uses to describe Jesus’ address is *percellere*, to undercut or strike with consternation, a harsh word that leaves no doubt as to the tone of the irony.²¹ Thus in both these two devotional works, as elsewhere, More relates genre to decorum.

Perhaps the most controversial, at least to the modern mind, way in which he relates the two is in his *Responsio ad Lutherum*. At the end of that work, More apologizes to the reader for inflicting on

²¹ For more discussion of the irony in *De Tristitia Christi*, see my article, “‘Quid dormitis?’: More’s use of Sleep as a Motif in *De Tristitia*,” *Miscellanea Moreana: Essays for Germain Marc’hadour*. *Moreana* 100 (XXVI), 55-69.

him “things such as I think your sense of modesty shuns.” He is speaking specifically of “indecent words” [*uerbis inhonestis*]. But, he goes on, it is not “effective to recount decently what has been written indecently” (684/5-17). His defence of his own unseemly language rests on the argument that like must be met with like. Indeed, the language of religious polemic, not least in the mouth of Luther, was unseemly and More therefore no doubt felt he was obeying the dictates of decorum for that genre. One might well wonder, however, if he momentarily forgot his Quintilian, who repeats several times that when expediency and seemliness are at variance, the orator must always choose the latter. True, Luther’s language in the *Contra Henricum* was extraordinarily violent and vulgar, as Headley says in his edition of the *Responsio* (CW5, 724), and was hardly any better in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. It is also true that Luther’s wit is buffoonish [*scurrilis*], as More contends in his peroration. Again, More responds in like vein, with ribald jokes, abuse, and vulgar witticisms; and again, he defends his tactics as a befitting response to Luther’s “ravings.” Granted, then, the language of religious polemic was for neither the sensitive nor the squeamish, the age having not, as Headley says, “passed through the purging experiences of Puritanism and modern plumbing” (820), and Luther was particularly fluent in it. Nevertheless, after reading More’s polemical works, one cannot help feeling that excessive zeal rather than respect for any genre-related decorum guided his pen. Perhaps one is left simply agreeing, as did Joseph Trapp in discussing the *Apology*, that More’s verbal abuse is “undeniably tedious and distasteful” (CW9, xxiii).

An essential component of style is diction. Here, too, the principle of decorum comes into force. Horace had said in his *Epistles* (II.2.119ff) that a poet must have the courage to delete words that are “unsuitable,” that is, undignified or insufficiently weighty or worthy of the subject. On the other hand, both Cicero and Quintilian had insisted that the style adopted be consistent with ordinary speech; words must be idiomatic, not precious. In the sixteenth century, decorum in diction covered three controversial areas of language: the value and appropriateness of the vernacular; the need to respect the

meanings of words; and the introduction of coinages or words borrowed from other languages. More comments on all three.

Discussion of the vernacular appears in more than one of his works although, again, receives no extended treatment in the form of a theoretical text. In this respect, More is not unlike his fellow Englishmen. Waswo comments that, unlike the Italians and French, who wrote dialogues and treatises, the English “make remarks by the way in other contexts” about the vernacular.²² More’s remarks about vernacular languages first appear in the *Utopia*. The Utopians, Hythloday says, were taught various branches of knowledge in their native tongue, although they also learned Latin and Greek. The Utopian vernacular is neither “deficient in vocabulary” [*inops*], nor “harsh in sound” [*insuavis*], and is a “very faithful means of expressing thought” [*fidelior animi interpres*] (158/11-15). Here, More is touching upon four aspects of the humanist discussion of the value of the vernaculars, started in Italy but moving on to France and England by his time.

Firstly, the Utopians consider their native tongue suitable as a language of instruction in the various subjects they study: music, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, philosophy and natural sciences. In short, those very subjects that critics of the vernacular pounced on as requiring instruction in Latin, but that educators like Vives, Palsgrave and Elyot believed could be taught in the vernacular. In his epigram praising Holt’s Latin grammar *Lac puerorum. Anglice Mylke for chyl dren*, entitled “Thome More, disertu adolescentuli in lucubraciunculas Holtiade” and written at about the same time as *Utopia*, More suggests that a young child begin learning Latin in “the native tongue” (CW3, Part II, 294/25-26), a view that traditionalists found heretical but that the humanists had encouraged from the late fifteenth century on. Opponents of the vernaculars, as well as most

²² Waswo, 199. While Waswo’s comment is applicable to More, the reason he offers for the absence in England of treatises on the vernacular obviously is not. He argues that English Protestantism, whose language was the vernacular, made theoretical discourse unnecessary.

translators, believed them lexically inadequate. Complaints are regularly found in translators' prefaces, for example, of the paucity of words as compared with the copiousness of Greek and Latin. Defenders of the vernaculars, on the other hand, amongst them John Rastell, More's brother-in-law, argue that native tongues are sufficient for imparting knowledge.²³ The Utopian language, Hythloday says, is not wanting. Nor is it unpleasant to listen to. Again, opponents of the vernaculars accused them of sounding "harsh" as compared with "mellifluous" Greek and Latin. Lastly, the comment that the Utopian language is adequate for conveying thought alludes to what Waswo calls "the handiest theory" for legitimizing the vernaculars, that which explained language as a channel of communication, conveying thoughts and emotions and making dialogue possible.²⁴

Hythloday's final comment on the Utopian language is perhaps more difficult to interpret. Utopian is almost the same as other neighbouring languages, he says, but less corrupt; the corruption varies from region to region (158/14-15). Surtz's tentative suggestion (433-34) that Utopian might represent English whereas these neighbouring languages could be West Germanic is improbable, if only because the concept of language classification that established families like West Germanic postdates More by several centuries. Rather, More might be alluding to the generally held belief that younger languages, the European vernaculars, resulted from varying degrees of corruption of Latin.²⁵ As they stand in relation to Latin, so does Utopian to some Ur-sprache--perhaps Persian since Hythloday tells us it resembles that language--but it is less corrupt than its fellow derivatives. This is consistent with the idealist view that Hythloday presents of the island.

²³ Richard Foster Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language* (London: Oxford UP, 1953), 56-57.

²⁴ Waswo, 136.

²⁵ For a discussion of these views see Robert A. Hall, Jr., *The Italian Questione della lingua: An Interpretative Essay*. University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literature, No. 4 (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1942).

Much later, in his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More defended the appropriateness of the vernacular once more, this time concerning English and the translation of the Scriptures. Responding to the accusations of barbarousness and inadequacy levelled against English, he says:

For as for that oure tonge is called barbarouse/ is but a fantasye. For so is euery lerned man knoweth/ euery straunge langage to other. And yf they wolde call it barayne of wordys/ there is no doute but it is plentuousse ynoughe to expresse oure myndys in any thyng whereof one man hath vused to speke with another. (337/21-26)

By interpreting the word "barbarous" literally, as "strange," meaning "foreign," rather than giving it its later, derived meaning, "ineloquent," More dismisses the first accusation, which was constantly levelled against English in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. By pointing to the lexical sufficiency of English to communicate ideas, he gives the second equally short shrift. English, despite opinions to the contrary, is copious enough to convey thought and is thus a fit and adequate language for dialogue. As Jones points out, in England lexical inadequacy inspired the most heated linguistic discussion, not least because opinions were divided as to the methods by which to remedy the situation. He accuses More, with some of his contemporaries, of sidestepping the issue of written discourse by responding that English is rich enough for anyone to exchange ideas by "speaking it with another." However, More is not being disingenuous and is not necessarily distinguishing between written and oral discourse; he is simply reiterating the humanist equation of thought and speech. Words constitute the thoughts they convey, be they spoken or written. The individual creates meanings these however must be conveyed by conforming to the grammatical and semantic, but also the lexical, norms of the language used by a given speech community, whatever those might be. This is an

argument used by other apologists for English like Elyot and Ascham.²⁶

There are nevertheless some instances in which the vernacular is inadequate or inappropriate. In the *Letter to the University of Oxford* of 1518 or 1519, More defended the use of Greek partly on the grounds it was the language of the New Testament and theology; not only was it appropriate for a liberal arts education, but it was necessary for studying divinity. Moreover, he adds humorously, one would be hard put to find much theology written in English (*CW*15, 141/1-5). The vernacular is inappropriate, he asserts in the 1533 *Apology* and *Debellation of Salem and Bizance*, for criticism of the clergy in writings to which the “unlettered” have access. In the *Apology*, More contends that the Pacifier, unlike Jean Gerson who had written his criticisms in Latin, purposely writes in English “bycause he wolde haue the lay peple both men & women loke on them” (*CW*9, 60/12-20). When the Pacifier retorts in his *Salem and Bizance* that Latin admonishments, because limited, had had no effect on the much needed clerical reforms, More rebuts him in the *Debellation* by reiterating his belief that the Pacifier’s purpose was to put the laity “in remembraunce to mende them” (23/11-12).

Elsewhere in the *Apology*, More refers to another purposeful misuse of the vernacular, reminding his reader of Tyndale’s wilful mistakes in translating the New Testament (11) and stating unequivocally that salvation does not rest upon reading the Scriptures in English. People can be saved by being taught them in sermons, as generations of English people had been (13/15-17-14/5). Moreover, he adds, the vast majority of them cannot read English anyway. In other words, More sees the role of the vernacular in religious matters as a limited one, although, as he says, he is not against translation of the Scriptures into English *per se*. The question of translating the Bible into the vernaculars was no doubt a vexed one for More, not least because his friend Erasmus had enthusiastically embraced the idea in his *Paraclesis* in 1516. More had addressed the subject in Book II of his *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, advocating an episcopal

²⁶ Jones, 55-57.

authorization for using the vernacular version of the Scriptures, and again in his *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, published one year before the *Apology*, where he speaks of Henry VIII’s desire to prohibit the Scriptures in English from being “amonge the people’s hands” for fear of their transformation of good things into bad, their “turning all hony in to posyn” (*CW*8, 179/3-7).²⁷

The second aspect of diction on which More has something to say concerns semantics. No doubt partly on account of his training as a lawyer he was fascinated by words and their meanings. Many is the time he interrupts a work—even a devotional one like the *De tristitia*--to explain the etymology or significance of a term. For example, he opens the work with a discussion of the text “across the stream Cedron to the outlying estate named Gethsemane,” in which he explains at length the significance of the Hebrew etymology of the proper names and states that polysemy in the Scriptures makes the text “teem with various mysterious meanings” (*CW*14, 13/1-25/3). Further on, he stops to explain the etymology of “Simon,” “Cephas” and “Malchus” in order to support his claim that the Scriptures contain irony (161/5-163/8).

At a time when English was in a state of flux and meanings of words were not yet widely or uniformly prescribed, More favoured the principle of common usage, as we saw in the *Letter to Dorp*. Again, he endorses what the Classical authors said on the subject. For him, as for Horace and Quintilian, “use was the sole arbiter and norm of speech.” Words have accepted meanings, dictated by reason, sanctioned over a period of time, and above all, understood by the majority of people. A sudden and deliberate shift away from an accepted meaning can result in misunderstanding and confusion. This is not to say that More did not recognise the phenomenon of semantic shift. In the *Confutation*, to attack Tyndale for offering false meanings of the word “church,” he uses the principle of common

²⁷ See the editorial note on the Report of the Royal Commission of 1530 to which More is alluding (Part 3, 1529) and which decided that “the hauing of the whole in English is not necessarye to cristen men.” Henry nevertheless announced he would commission a translation when the right moment came.

usage to defend the traditional meanings ("comen custome") used by the English, which are the only "ryght and proper" meanings. The words can be ancient English with long established meanings, "vsed before dayes," or new ones borrowed from Latin, French or Spanish. However, in the case of the latter, their meaning might change in England. It is the new "English" meaning that must then prevail (167/19-31). In the same work, More refers to semantic shifts when he explains the etymology of the Greek word *ecclesia*, saying that the meaning has narrowed, or become more specific (a common form of shift) since Christians used it (171/1-17). His criticisms of many of Tyndale's words also concern the widening or generalization of terms sanctioned by common usage. It is the idiomatic use of terms and their meanings that must prevail. In *The Answer to the Poisoned Book*, More accuses the Masker of speaking "englyshe as congrewe as a man myghte that hadde lerned his englishe in a nother lande" (CW12, 159/6-7), and criticizes the Masker for misusing terms like "dissemble," which in actual fact should apply to him. As the editors of the work say, More carefully looks for abuses of the truth "in the shifting surface of words." For More, language is a powerful tool in the hands of heretics: their misuse of words and arbitrary attribution of meaning that ignores the rule of common usage constitute a danger that must be challenged.

More links the principle of common usage to the third aspect of diction that we mentioned, lexical coinages and borrowings from native or foreign sources. Horace had stated in his *Ars poetica* that old words could be resurrected and new words fall into disuse, and had gone so far as to say in his *Epistles* (II.2) that unearthing long-lost terms is the business of the poet, but that whatever applies at a given time--in a given place, More would add--must be respected, according to the usage of that time and place. More himself, as Delcourt noted long ago, introduced a large number of new usages, new compounds, and new words. However, Horace had added a warning to his advice to resurrect old words: it must be done with caution. So More wonders in his Letter to Giles if he will publish his *Utopia* because, amongst other things, "smatterers despise as trite whatever is not packed with obsolete expressions" (44/2-3). More might, as Surtz

suggests, be alluding to the affected, antiquated Latinate style of Italian writers, mentioned by Erasmus in the *Adages* (292). However, it is just as likely that he is referring to the practice in England of resurrecting old English words. Although Caxton had condemned it in 1490 in his Preface to the *Eneydos*, many had over-enthusiastically embraced it, along with a wholesale adoption of ancient Greek and Latin words, named "inkhorn terms." Either way, More is mocking the unbridled borrowing of words and in so doing, he once again underlines the Horatian belief that decorum dictates restraint.

Like his remarks on language, More's comments on translation are scattered throughout his works. Similarly, many of the points we have mentioned concerning decorum in language also concern translation. More, along with his fellow humanists, was well aware of the difficulties inherent in translating. In his *Letter to Dorp*, he says that "nobody ever claimed that nothing escaped a translator in a translation" for translators are human and can thus make mistakes. Even a good translation can be improved but, he says in answer to the oft-asked question whether a translation is ever finished (Dorp himself had not asked the question although More makes it seem that way), some translations are so apt and so free of errors that "as long as [the] work stays intact" no one will wish to change it (82/1-9). Glyn Norton argues that the humanists' view of translation as a tool in language learning (i.e., Latin) and part of a linguistic process means that for them a translation is never complete and "no translator can assert with conviction that his work is truly finished."²⁸ More, like Cicero, Quintilian and his fellow humanists, does indeed see translation as a useful educational tool. In one of his letters to his children he advises them to compose their text first in English, then translate it into Latin; not having to look for the subject, they can thus concentrate on the language.²⁹ However, at least in this comment to

²⁸ Glyn Norton, *The Ideology and Language of Translation in Renaissance France and their Humanist Antecedents* (Geneva: Droz, 1984), 29.

²⁹ Thomas More to his Dearest Children and to Margaret Gyge, whom he numbers among his Children, Rogers, 255-57.

Dorp, he conceives of a translation being a finished product and Norton's comment does not apply to him.

Expressing the same opinion as other humanists who wrote on translation, More concedes that translating is difficult. In the *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, he broaches the difficulty arising from the dichotomy of meaning and form, of "sentence" and what he calls the "grace" of the source text, which often occurs in translating. How can the translator render both and with equal accuracy? It is an age-old question. In discussing the clergy's, but not his own, opposition to translating the Bible into English, he says that the difficulty a translator experiences comes from trying to express "well and lyuely the sentence of hys authour/whyche is harde alway to do so surely but that he shall somtyme mynyshe eyther of the sentence or of the grace that it bereth in the formare tonge" (337/26-30). However, he continues, this must not deter one, for it had beset previous translators, even St. Jerome. In the *Confutation*, More points to the differences in syntax that exist between languages (236/3-7). In discussing Tyndale's translation of the opening words of the Gospel of St. John, he emphasizes the syntactical differences between English, Greek and Latin. In the first, word order is important, although in the last two it is not. More is implicitly recognizing that English is an analytical language whereas Greek and Latin are synthetic. If this is the case it makes More unusual. Padley in his discussion of English humanist grammarians, questions whether even Lily understood the analytical nature of English as opposed to Latin.³⁰ Some, More says, will take exception to changing the word order in biblical translation. Perhaps he was thinking of Jerome, who said in his letter to Pammachius, *De Optimo genere interpretandi*, that he usually translated according to the meaning [*sensum de sensu*] and not word for word [*verbum e verbo*], except in the case of the Scriptures, where even the word order was mystical and therefore should not be changed in translation [*absque Scripturis sanctis ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est*]. However, More continues, if you translate word for word, without

changing the word order, you will have an incomprehensible, wrong or even contradictory sentence (236/7-12).

A problem very much related to translating was, for the humanists, the state of the source text. In his *Letter to Oxford University*, More defends the teaching of Greek and uses as one reason the fact that older Latin translations are bad. Present ones are better but they do nothing to make the Greek text less corrupt and more expressive (*CW15*, 142/25-29). He had said as much to Dorp earlier, when deploring the dialecticians' translations of the Greek Fathers and Aristotle, saying they seem to be "done" [*versi*] in such a way that they are "undone" [*subversi*] (*CW15*, 100/7-8). The problem of source texts and their resulting poor translations also besets biblical translators. In his *Responsio ad Lutherum*, More uses this fact to argue against the sole use of Scripture as authority, pointing out that some Pauline epistles are lost while others are translated incorrectly [*vertuntur perperam*], ambiguously [*vertuntur ambigue*], or in such a way that they do not agree on all points; the meaning is thus unclear and controversial (*CW15*, 98/30-33-100/1). He had raised the same question of corrupt source texts and the translator's role in correcting them in his earlier discussions of Erasmus' New Testament. In both the *Letter to Dorp* and *Letter to a Monk*, More defends the humanist practice of collating various source texts before translating them. He tells Dorp that the Church believes that "the true Gospel is in the Greek texts" but that it is also present in the Latin translation because it has faith in the translator (86/11-15). Jerome himself, he tells the Monk, emended existing Latin translations rather than doing one from scratch, rooting out "corruptions," and basing his translation of the New Testament on "trustworthy Greek texts" (228/3-5). The translator, then, is not simply a bilingual wordsmith but also a biblical philologist. Again, More is subscribing to an accepted humanist view. Translation is the reconstruction of a text, as is philology

One aspect of translating discussed by More touches upon what modern translation theorists call text typology. More distinguishes between religious and secular translating, as indeed had St. Jerome in his famous letter to Pammachius, as we saw on page 23. The reason for word-for-word translation of the Scriptures was of

³⁰ G.A. Padley, *Grammatical Theory in Western Europe, 1500-1700. The Latin Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), Vol II, 43.

course the fear of slippage, of misinterpreting God's word, but the *sensum de sensu/verbum e verbo* dichotomy was to extend far beyond scriptural translation and the time of either St. Jerome or More. In his *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, More voices this concern over slippage and repudiates free biblical translation: "it is dangerous to translate the texte of scrypture out of one tongue into another, as holy saynt Hyerom testyfieth, for as moche as in translacyon it is harde always to kepe the same sentence [meaning] hole" (508-09). In the *Confutation*, he says that although it would be a "noughtye translatour" who would wilfully change the meaning of a word, nevertheless he can take liberties in a "phrophane comen storye, in whych men maye boldly be in the translacyon at myche more lybertye then in holy scrypture" (186/30-35). Thus More is following in Jerome's footsteps in establishing a hierarchy of texts, applying what today's translation theorists call text typology to translation, that is, requiring that the type or method of translating used be appropriate to the nature and intent of the source text. More seems to have put theory into practice, for his own biblical translations are far more literal than many of his Greek epigrams, for example.

More is also aware of another aspect of translating that is discussed by many modern theorists: the translator's intent and how it may differ from that of the author. He is not against translating the Scriptures, he says several times, but he *is* against translating them in order to misinform one's readers. Both Luther and Tyndale are guilty of tricking the uneducated into heresy by mistranslating scriptural passages and terms. They should inform, not defraud, and in language that the uneducated will understand. Luther is doing nothing less than to make Satan's works prosper (*Responsio*, 646/12-15). In the *Dialogue*, the Messenger is told that some mistranslations can be tolerated because they are not serious. Others, which concern changing the names of "so gret thynges into so far the worse" and which occur "so often and so contynually," are the result of Tyndale's "mischievousness" (287/27-35). Even, More says in the *Confutation*, mistranslating the words "church," "priest," "grace," "charity," "confession" and "penance" could be excused if by someone "wythout

euyll meanyng"; Tyndale, however, uses them to give his heresies a semblance of scriptural authority among the ignorant.

Several of More's attacks on these specific words in Tyndale's translation are based, not on doctrinal issues but on translational and linguistic ones. In one instance he applies what in modern translation theory is called the principle of "dynamic equivalence," elaborated, coincidentally, in the context of Bible translation. When necessary, the translator must choose terms that will convey meaning to the target, not the source reader, even if this means changing the referents in the source text.³¹ Thus in translating a Latin chronicle into English, More says in the *Confutation*, the translator should choose "aldermen" for "senatores" or "seniores" and "mayor," "alderman" or "comen consayle" for "senatus Londiniensis," for these are the terms in use in English (187/1-12).

The linguistic principle that arouses the most ire in More is what he sees as Tyndale's rejection of the principle of common usage. His discounting of Tyndale's translation of the Greek word "presbyter" as "elders," for example, rests on this accusation. The meaning of "elder" as "priest" is not sanctioned by common usage and never has been, he asserts (183/7-9). Similarly, he defends the word "charity" on grounds of common usage. Tyndale must not replace it with "love" because "charity" obeys the rules of common usage pertaining to place and time--what it signifies in English, not in Latin whence it came, and what it signifies now, not in the old days, for people change or forget meanings of words (*Confutation* 201/26-29, 202/1-4). Tyndale's rejection of "charity" is based on the fact that the word has a variety of meanings. More counters that context

³¹ The theory of "formal" and "dynamic" equivalence was elaborated by Eugene Nida in the 1960s, (*Toward a Science of Translating: with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden; Brill, 1964)) and still holds sway in some circles today, although challenged by many theorists, among whom in particular, Henri Meschonnic (*Poétique du traduire* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1999)) and Antoine Berman (*La traduction et la lettre, ou l'auberge du lointain* (Paris: Seuil, 1999)).

determines meaning (199/23-31). He thus applies to translation principles that he had raised in relation to language.

Another point that concerns translation, as it had language, in More's writings is grammar. While in his *Letter to Dorp* he had restricted the role and significance of grammar to observing and describing the rules governing a language, elsewhere he gives it a more prescriptive function, emphasizing its role as a useful weapon in attacking the writings and translations of heretics. In the controversial writings, he criticizes his adversaries' grammar, or their lack of it.³² In the *Confutation*, he lectures Tyndale on his misuse of the definite article, which he rightly says in English performs a defining or deictic function; the absence of an article in Latin results in confusion whereas in Greek and English its presence clarifies meaning. Tyndale, who knows Greek, must be held accountable for omitting it in his translation. Similarly, he should know the difference between using "yes" and "yea" and "no" and "nay" in response to negative or affirmative questions. These points, More concedes, are not in themselves important but they undermine Tyndale's credibility as a translator and, he adds sarcastically, "though I can not make hym by no meane to wryte trewe mater, I wolde haue hym yet at the leste wyse wryte trew englyshe" (232/10-12). However, his greatest anger in matters grammatical is reserved for Luther, whom he accuses of being totally ignorant of Latin grammar, despite his boasts to the contrary (*Responsio*, 446). To Luther's question "Who is such a mad grammarian?" More replies that Luther's heresies are "ungrammared" and "mad with their own bad grammar" (466/19-22). There are many minor quibbles about Luther's grammar throughout the *Responsio*, although in his letters to Dorp and the University of Oxford More had adopted a critical stance towards such grammatical arguments and speculation. However, in those early texts he had also defended the use of grammar as a tool by which to increase one's understanding of biblical texts and point theology in a new direction, as we have seen

³² For a detailed discussion of More's comments on grammar in the controversial writings, see Germain Marc'hadour, *Thomas More et la Bible*, op. cit., 250-62.

Thus, in the *Responsio* he also turns to grammar as it relates to theology, using it as a weapon with which to attack Luther, whose ignorance of Latin grammar, says More, explains his mistranslation of the words, "This is my body, this is my blood" (450-58). Indeed, as Luther's repudiation of the doctrine of transubstantiation and his reinterpretation of these very words were erected on what More saw as the sands of grammatical misunderstanding, More built his counterargument upon what he believed to be a rock--that of his superior knowledge of Latin grammar. Not only did Luther's ignorance of grammar lead to heresy concerning one of Christianity's central doctrines, it also enabled him to allow any scriptural interpretation "whatever seems alright to the faithful" (618-20). Thus while grammar was relegated by More to a more modest position in the trivium on account of its inappropriate use by the Scholastic dialecticians, it became crucial to the question of biblical translation and thus, in a wider context, to that of heresy.

For More, the subjects of language and translation, as we have sought to demonstrate in this article, often went beyond the bounds of Classical discourse as found in authors like Cicero, Horace or Quintilian to embrace humanist writers on language like Valla and of course his friend Erasmus. In terms of translation, he followed Cicero and Quintilian in praising it as a valid educational tool, a view espoused by several humanist educators. He also related translation to philology, again placing himself squarely in the humanist tradition. As for his insistence that meaning must be of tantamount importance in translating a text, he was following in the footsteps of both Cicero and St. Jerome. In relating translation to grammar, lexical concerns and semantics, he pursued the idea that in all three areas the translator must, like the writer of an original text, follow the rules of common usage, a view found in Horace and Quintilian. Thus he harmoniously drew together his ideas on language and translation. Central to his views on both, however, remains the Horatian principle of decorum, developed and taken to new heights by the humanists, for whom the idea of speaking appropriately is linked to behaving appropriately. While he did not, like Erasmus in the *Ciceronianus* for example, discuss it at length, decorum dictated much of his attitude towards

style, diction and grammar, towards subject matter and genre and their appropriateness to audience, and finally to his elaboration of certain translating practices, all of which are dealt with in the many comments scattered throughout his writings. In conclusion, it would not be going too far to say that the decorum he believed was a necessary governing principle in language was also essential to his very philosophy of life. In word, as in deed, appropriateness was all. Again in this he was at one with his fellow humanists for whom, as Gray says, “the idea of always speaking appropriately, of suiting style and manner to subject, aim, and audience is treated as the exact analogue of behaving with *decorum*.”³³ Although More at times wavered from this high principle, especially in relation to the pursuit of heresy, it is nevertheless discernible throughout his writings, from the early *Utopia*, where we are told that the practical philosophy for a statesman “knows its stage, adapts itself to the play in hand, and performs its role neatly and appropriately” (99/11-14), to his final letter to his daughter Margaret, in which he expresses his desire to die on the morrow, the eve of St. Thomas’ Day, for he says, “it were very mete and conveniente for me
