

e-Journal of Linguistics

Analysis of Three Dimensions of Meaning in the Translation of Religious Verbal Symbols in the Book of Revelation

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ABSTRACT

This present study was intended to reveal that it is so important for a translator to understand meaning when rendering messages from a source text into target text. According to Nida (1964:57), the translator's low conception of meaning is made up of three dimensions; they are linguistic meaning, referential meaning, and emotive meaning. Such a low conception causes the meaning which is rendered to be distorted, and this negatively affects the target readers especially the common ones, and will become worse when the text which is translated is the one with symbolic language in which the element of the sign, which is referred to as *representament*, is conventionally related to the object it refers to. The result of analysis of the three dimensions of the meaning of the symbolic phrase *the key of David*, which is literally translated into *kunci Daud*, and is dynamically translated into *kunci yang dimiliki Daud* can cause the dynamic meaning to be distorted. The result of analysis in which the grammatical meaning and the referential meaning of the symbolic phrase *the key of David* confirm each other is figuratively understood as the authority which is not attached to the entity which is referred to as Daud; rather, it refers to the authority which is trusted to him. On the other hand, the result of the analysis of emotive meaning, which shows a positive appreciation of the dynamic translation



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product, implies that it is so important for the translator to understand the symbolic meaning in depth in the process of rendering messages from the source text to the target text.

Keywords: *grammatical meaning, referential meaning, emotive meaning*

1. Introduction

It can be universally stated that meaning plays an important role in the translating activity through which the messages in one language are transferred to another language. Such messages, as the object in such a process, accuracy, readability, and acceptability should be taken into consideration. Without any theoretical explanation on meaning, it will be highly difficult to understand the important issues in translation. The nature of translation, translatability, untranslatability, and equivalence exemplify this. Thus, the most fundamental principle in various discussions on the translating process is the conception of the dimensions of meaning which, according to Nida (1964:57), are made up of three; they are the linguistic meaning, referential meaning, and emotive meaning.

The linguistic meaning, which is then referred to as the grammatical meaning refers to the meaningful relation among the constituents in a grammatical construction. On the other hand, the referential meaning is defined as the meaning of a word which refers to an object, event, an abstract thing, and relation. According to Nida and Taber (1982: 56), the referential meaning is identical with the conceptual meaning which contains logical, cognitive or denotative content. The third meaning is the emotive meaning which is well-known as the connotative meaning which is associated with someone's emotional reaction towards a word in a communication (Nida and Taber, 1974: 71).

A symbol, as the element of communication, which has connotative meaning as well as literal meaning, is the object of the message rendering or translating activity. Apart from being complex, the values of this figurative language are different from those of what it represents. Ricouer (1974) defines that a symbol is a structure of meaning whose direct, primary or literal meaning refers to indirect, secondary and figurative meaning which can only be understood through the direct and primary meaning. Apart from having a complicated definition, a symbol is



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also believed to have a significant function in the human life in general and spiritual life in particular as, for example, illustrated by Tillich in Dillistone (2000); it is defined as a medium for widening knowledge, stimulating imagination and deepening the human conception. It is also believed that a symbol can open the human spiritual dimension; as a result, it is correspondent with the highest real aspect.

The meaning of a symbol, as described above, is necessarily well understood when transferring meaning and the verbal symbols written in the Holy Book used as spiritual guidance by people. The distorted meaning in the translating process contributes to the extent to which the message is represented by a symbol; especially the background of the source text is different from that of the target text. The Book of Revelation is the last part of 66 books in the Bible, which, at least, contains 133 symbols. Such a book, as part of the New Testament, was written in Greek and was translated into different languages, including into English and Indonesian.

2. Theoretical Basis

In the grammatical level it can be understood that not all the same structures have the same meaning. According to Nida (1964:59), the reason is that such a structure is transformed from the different kernel sentences. Therefore, the deep structure needs to be reconstructed to eliminate the ambiguous message in the surface structure. In relation to this, Nida and Tiber (1974:39) stated that a translator should understand that languages have the basic structural elements 'kernel' which construct the surface structure. Therefore, if the translator can simplify the grammatical structure to the kernel level, such a structure can be transferred more easily with the least distortion.

The referential meaning of a symbol which does not have any similarity to, analogy or any factual relation with the object which it refers to can be determined using the semiotic analysis. This is in accordance with what is stated by Bassnett (1980/1991:34) that the first step in the translating activity is that the linguistic-centered process should be accepted as part of the semiotic study, that is, the study which is concerned with the system or structure, process, and function of signs.



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The semiotic analysis is focused on the functional structural relation in the designating system which involves the process of identifying the constituent units of the semiotic system, the structural relation among signs (oppositional, correlational and logical relation) and the relation among each part with the whole text. Such a relation was simplified by Saussure into three types of systemic relation, namely, the relation between the signifier and signified, the relation between the sign and all the other elements in one system/code, and the relation between the sign and the surrounding elements. In the structural semiotics such three types of the systematic relation can be analyzed through the difference which appears between the signifier known as the syntagmatic analysis (which is concerned with position) and the paradigmatic analysis (which is concerned with substitution/associative relation).

In the level of the emotive level, one of the methods which can be used to determine the connotative aspect of a word, phrase, or sentence is the method which is adopted from Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum. Such a method, which was described by Nida and Taber (1974:91), is applied by contrasting the 1-10 scaled adjectival pairs in order to describe the respondent's emotional reaction to the translation product.

3. Research Methodology

This present study is a descriptive qualitative one. The data sources consist of the primary data source and the secondary data source. The primary data source are in the form of the religious verbal symbols which can be found in the Book of Revelation. Such a book is the last book of the 66 books which are included in the Bible, and is widely used as guidance by all the Christians. The Bible, which is intended in this present study, is made up of two versions; they are the Indonesian Literal Translation (ILT) which represents the literal version, and the *Bahasa Indonesia Sederhana (BISD)* which represents the free translation. On the other hand, the secondary data source included the questionnaire distributed to 10 respondents who were knowledgeable of the readability of symbols. The data were in the form of a parallel corpus which is made up of the symbolic original text (which is written in English as the source language) and its translation version (which is written in Indonesian as the target language).

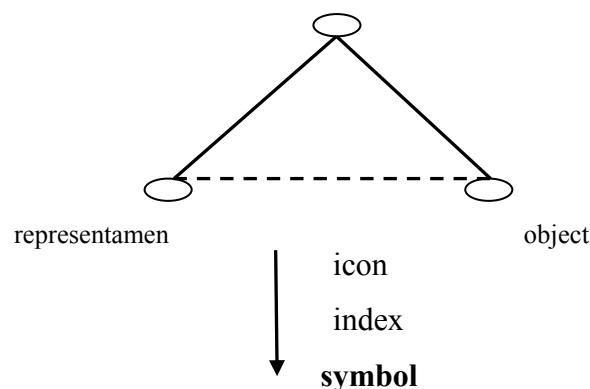


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The data in this present study were obtained through library research and field research in which the library research is the priority. Such a method was conducted through the techniques of collecting data such as the reading technique, questionnaire, and the data and theoretical triangulation. The process of the data analysis started from the tabulation of the data available based on the translation version; then the data were analyzed based the three dimensions of meaning; they are the grammatical dimension, the referential dimension, and the emotive dimension. The data were analyzed by simplifying the structure and revealing the relation among the signs empirically using the 1-10 scaled matrix as the instrument.

4. Discussion

The visualization of the symbolic language in the model relation of the three elements of a sign, in accordance with Peirce, is illustrated by Eco (1976) as follows.



**Figure 1. Model Relation among Three Elements of Signs According to Peirce
(Source: Eco, 1976)**

Based on the above figure the symbol which appears in the text is referred to as representament, or, in this case, it is referred to as *legisign* as a symbol has conventional relation with the object which it refers to. Thus, a symbol refers to what is referred to as *reference* or *sense* which is still hidden; it is this which is referred to as the object. Unlike the symbol, the

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index has physical relation with the object which it refers to, and the icon almost entirely represents the physical nature of the object which it represents.

One of the signs which appears in the literal translation product and free translation product of the Bible in general and the Book of Revelation in particular is the sign in the form of a noun phrase *kunciDaud* which is made up of the word *kunci*, the Greek word for it is *kleis*, and the word *Daud*, well-known as *Dauid*. This sign is translated into ‘*the key of David*’ which is referred to as the representement and can be classified a symbol as it has conventional relation with the object it refers to. The tabulation of the literal and free translations of *kunciDaud* in the two translation versions of the Bible are as follows:

Table 1. The Tabulation of the Literal and Free Translations of the Symbol ‘kunciDaud’

	ILT (Literal)	BISD (Free)
Revelation 3:7	KunciDaud	Kunci yang dimiliki Raja Daud

Analysis of the Grammatical Meaning

The corpus of the literal and free translations above shows that the two versions in the surface structure show an insignificant difference. The noun phrase which is made up of the noun head *kunci* is followed by the processor *Daud*. However, in free BISD version, the possessor begins with the noun modifier *yang dimiliki*. In relation to this, Bratcher and Hatton (1993: 72) firmly stated that the noun modifier gives an impression that the key used to belong to Daud. This firmly express the literal meaning of the noun head *kunci*.

From the grammatical/linguistic meaning, the phrasal structure of *kunciDaud* which is the translation equivalent of *the key of David* can be transformed based on the kernel illustration type 2 such as *John hit Bill*. According to Nida and Taber (1974:37), the reason is that such a structure is not the common possessive structure, as illustrated by *David’s key* which contains meaning of the key of Daud. In this case, however, the possessor, namely, Daud plays an active



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role as the role played by the phrase *the book of Moses* which means that *Moses wrote the book* rather than *Moses had the book*.

Based on what was described above, the transformational result based on the kernel structure of the nominal phrase *kunciDaud* is in accordance with the consideration that the figurative meaning of the noun head *kunci* is authority (*otoritas* or *wewenang* or *kekuasaan*:

John hit Bill (the illustration of kernel type two).

Daud menerima kunci (otoritas/kewibawaan/wewenang)

The event verb which can be possibly used to connect the word *Daud* and the word *kunci* is *menerima* (receiving); the reason is that authority or power is not owned by somebody but it is provided or trusted to the receiver. The other possibility is the transformation which is based on the illustration of kernel type three, namely, *John gave Bill a ball*. This, in this case, causes the subject (X) to appear as the authority or power provider, meaning that 'X trusted David the key'. Such a type is illustrated as follows:

John gave Bill a ball (the illustration of kernel type three)

X trusted Daud the key (authority)

Analysis of Referential Meaning

The analysis of the above grammatical meaning needs to be completed with the referential analysis using the relation among symbols both in the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in order to be able to reveal the other hidden elements. In this case, several signs in the text of the Revelation Book which are in the same code are '*Dia yang kudus, yang benar*', '*otoritas untuk membuka dan menutup*', '*pintu terbuka*', (He who is holy and true, authority to open and close, the door is open) and '*gereja di Filadelfia*' (the Philadelphia Church) . All the signs can be found in the Book of Revelation 3:7-13. The relation among such signs can be mapped as the following chart.



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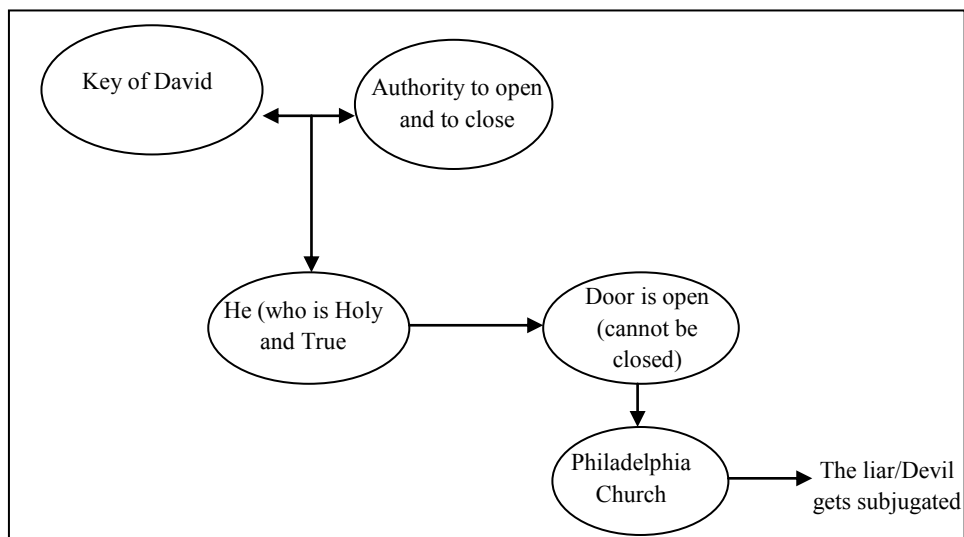


Figure 2. Patterns of Spatial and Narrative Symbol of *KunciDaud*

All the signs are spatially related (the relation between the center and the edge) and are sequentially related as well. Spatial relation means that the *kunci daud* (the key of David), as the center of information, is directly related to the ‘*otoritas/kewibawaan/wewenang* (authority to open and close the door). This is firmly revealed in Revelation 3:7 as follows:

“Dan tuliskanlah kepada malaikat gereja di Filadelfia: Dia yang kudus, yang benar, yang memegang kunci Daud yang membuka dan tidak seorangpun menutup, dan Dia menutup dan tidak seorang pun membuka”

[And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, and who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens].

Then, what can be observed is the narrative relation of which the signs are in one code which is connected in a series of events which direct to the beginning, middle, and end of a story.

Such a narrative relation is initiated with the event *the key of David* or, based on the kernel analysis, ‘*kunci/kewibawaan* (the key/authority) which was trusted to David and was currently held by an entity which is referred to as ‘He (who is Holy and True)’. The next event

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was the entity that held the key 'submitted' such a symbol which had the same authority as trusted to King David by the Parish in Philadelphia that faithfully adhered to commandment of God without any objection. All the series of events were ended with a promise that the liar/the angel would be subjugated as the authority provided to the community members was still faithfully maintained.

Such a series of events above is made to be stronger as can be seen from the paradigmatic relation, namely, the relation of the signs outside the text of the Revelation Book, or, by comparing and contrasting each sign which is in existence in the text with another sign which is not in existence or what is referred to as 'in absentia', which is certainly within the same paradigm (Chandler, 2007: 88).

In relation to such a conception, the signs which are outside the text but have the same paradigm are the signs which are made to appear in the Old Testament, namely the Book of Isaiah. The signs (those which are underlined) of the Revelation Book which are matched with the alternative signs in the Book of Isaiah are described as follows.

“Dan tuliskanlah kepada malaikat gereja di Filadelfia: Dia yang kudus, yang benar, yang memegang kunci Daud yang membuka dan tidak seorangpun menutup, dan Dia menutup dan tidak seorang pun membuka” (Wahyu. 3:7, ILT)

[And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, and who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens].

Dan aku (YAHWEH) akan memberikan kunci keluarga Daud ke atas bahunya (Elyakim), maka dia (Elyakim) membuka, dan tidak ada yang menutupnya; dan dia (Elyakim) akan menutup, dan tidak ada yang akan membukanya (Yesaya 22:22, ILT).

[Then I (YAHWEH) will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open]

The pragmatic tool which can be used to analyze such data is the commutation test. Such a tool allows each sign to be substituted for as they have the same role. As an illustration, YAHWEH, as the holder of the *key of David* can be matched with the entity He who is Holy and True; *the key of David*, as the point central in this analysis, can be matched with *the key of the*



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house of David; the church in Philadelphia, as the entity of the receiver, can be matched with entity referred to as *Eliakim*; the function of *the key of David*, as the symbol of authority, namely, as the symbol, which is illustrated by ‘opening and closing the door’, can also be matched between the selected signifier and alternative signifier.

In this case, the result of the commutation test can indirectly clarify the result of the analysis of the linguistic meaning through the kernel illustration that the phrase *the key of David* cannot be defined as the “key which belongs to David” or ‘the key which belongs to David’s family’. The reason is that the key word which means *authority* is not attached to Daud; rather, it is ‘held’ or ‘owned by another entity as the owner of the authority that is referred to as YAHWEH or ‘He who is Holy and True’. Such a key/authority is only trusted to David and the same authority is also trusted to the church in Philadelphia and the entity *Eliakim*.

Thus, the choice of the word *David* as the designation of the word *key* or *authority* that has full power or that cannot be interfered with another is based on several reasons. One of such reasons is that King David was the first Israeli leader (the God’s choice of people; they were chosen by God. This can be observed through one of the clauses in Act 13:22 and its translation versions:

Dan setelah menyingkirkan dia, Dia mengangkat Daud bagi mereka sebagai raja. Tentang ia pula, Dia berkata sambil bersaksi: Aku telah menemukan Daud, anak Isai, seseorang yang sesuai dengan hati-Ku, yang akan melakukan segala kehendak-Ku (ILT).

[After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all My will’]

On the other hand, the form of the authority which was provided to David as the king was the victory and fame as revealed in 1 Chronicles 17:7-8 (ILT):

Beginilah YAHWEH berfirman, Aku mengambil engkau daripadang rumput, ketika menggiring domba untuk menjadi pemimpin atas umat-Ku Israel; Aku telah menyertai engkau selama engkau berjalan dan telah memusnahkan semua musuhmu dari hadapanmu; dan membuat namamu seperti nama orang-orang besar yang ada di bumi.



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[Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a name like the name of the great ones who are in the earth]

The same victory and fame in the form of the authority were also provided to Eliakim and the Philadelphia church to defeat the enemies physically and spiritually.

Based such a conception, as the result of the linguistic and referential analysis, there are several translation products which should be reanalyzed especially the result of the dynamic translation which defines *kunci Daud* as the 'key which belonged to King David' (BISD). Another thing is the figurative conception of the word *key*; in this case, the authority as the right to determine spiritual things such as the God's kingdom. However, based on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis, the word *authority* is connected with the word *victory* over the enemy spiritually and physically, when the entity which is trusted as the key is still on earth as illustrated by *Eliakim* and the Philadelphia church.

Based on the stages of analysis above, the structure of the components of the literal and figurative meaning of the symbol *key* (David) is as follows.

Lalu mereka menunggu-nunggu
Sampai menjadi bingung, tetapi
Tidak membuka pintu kamar atas
itu. Sebab itu, mereka mengambil
kunci dan membuka pintu, maka
tampaklah tuan mereka telah mati
tergeletak di lantai (Hak. 3:25:ILT)

1. Berwujud fisik
2. Terbuat dari kayu/logam
3. Berfungsi membuka/menutup
Pintu

[They waited until they became
anxious; but behold, he did not
open the doors of the roof
chamber. Therefore they took the
key and opened them, and behold,
their master had fallen to the floor
dead.]

Dan tuliskanlah kepada malaikat
gereja di Filadelfia: Dia yang kudus,
yang benar, yang memegang kunci
(Daud), yang membuka dan tidak
seorang pun menutup, dan dia menutup
dan tidak seorang pun membuka, meng-
atakan hal-hal ini: (Why.3:7, ILT):

1. Abstrak
2. Otoritas/kewibawaan/wewenang

[And to the angel of the church
in Philadelphia write: He who is
holy, who is true, and who has
the key of David, who opens and
no one will shut, and who shuts
and no one opens].



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Based on what was described above, the supplementary component which unifies the signifiers is the key whose physical form functions to open or close the door and which can be stated to be equivalent to the authority. From the context of situation in the church in Philadelphia, such an authority was trusted to them to defeat the enemies as what had been undergone by King Daud. In this case, the supplementary component is equivalent to the main meaning.

Analysis of the Emotive Meaning

The investigation of the emotive meaning of the literal and dynamic translation equivalents of the symbol *kunci Daud* shows that the emotive reaction is positively shown by ten common readers of the dynamic translation product. Such a fact can be clearly pictured by the dotted line in the figure below. What was done by the translator to add information to the conception of the symbol was positively responded by the common readers as far as of the conception and clarity of the meaning of the symbol is concerned. Several words were added as the additional information to emphasize the possessor’s position as the owner of the key. Such additional information positively contributes to the emotive evaluation made by the common readers.

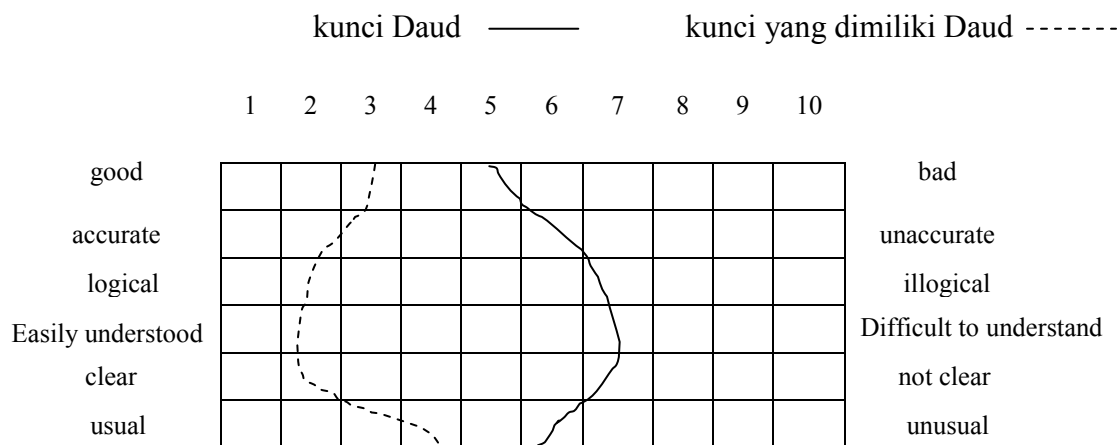


Figure 3. The Graph of the Emotive Meaning of the Symbol ‘KunciDaud’



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However, one thing which should be observed is the result of the analysis of the grammatical meaning is different from that of the referential meaning. Such a difference shows that the meaning of the dynamic translation is distorted as the result of the analysis of the emotive meaning shows that there is a positive response to the free translation version. The less deep conception that the common readers have of the meaning of the symbol could be responsible for this. They tended to receive the free translation product which is more commonly reasonable and more easily understood. The implication is that the translator should be careful when translating the meaning of the symbol from the source language into the target language. The analysis of three dimensions of meaning can be applied by the translator to reduce the distortion of meaning in the free translation product.

Conclusion

Meaning plays an important role in the process of translating the source language into the target language in general and the symbolic language whose representaments (the signs which appear in the text) are conventionally related to the objects they refer to. In relation to this, the in-depth conception of the meaning of a symbol can help the translator transfer the type of the figurative language from the source text to the target text. The meaning which is intended is made up of three dimensions; they are grammatical meaning, referential meaning, and emotive meaning.

The analysis of three dimensions of the meaning of the symbol *the key of David* which was formally translated into *kunci Daud* and dynamically translated into *kunci yang dimiliki Daud* shows that the meaning in the free translation product is getting distorted. The result of analysis in which the grammatical meaning and referential meaning confirm one another, as far as the conception of the phrase *kunci Daud* as the authority which is not attached to Daud but as something which was trusted to him is concerned, shows that the meaning of the phrase *the key of David* in the free translation product was wrongly understood. However, the common readers positively appreciate the free translation product, meaning that they do not understand the



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meaning of the symbol. The implication is that it is important for the translator to truly understand meaning when rendering symbols from the source language into the target language so the common readers will not misunderstand the meanings of symbols in the free translation product.

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