

SECTION V

CONCLUSION

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In Section I we have seen how the study of modern linguistics has externalized many of the processes which translators have been employing intuitively for thousands of years. Previously translation theory had tended to centre on the two general issues of 1) the conflict between literal and idiomatic translation and 2) the tension between the theoretical impossibility on the one hand, and the fact of translation on the other. Since World War II translation theory has benefited from advances in many disciplines but it remains essentially the province of Comparative Linguistics and in particular Semantics.

Views of linguistic relativity, associated nowadays with the American anthropologists Sapir and Whorf, imply that translation is an impossible venture. The notion that a language controls the thought processes of its speakers has fascinated not only anthropologists but also certain biblical scholars who have made sweeping claims with regard to Hebrew and Greek mentalities on the basis of the respective structures of these languages. But in so far as the Whorfian hypothesis can be formulated and tested, investigations hitherto have implied no more than that "languages differ essentially in what they must convey and not in what they can convey" (Jakobson 1971:264). However, in view of some recent research into the intricate hierarchical lexical organization of languages we are willing to allow for the possibility of some influence on cognitive processes at that level.

Having rejected any thesis of radical untranslatability based on linguistic relativity, we proceeded to describe the situations in which loss of meaning most typically occurs. Special attention was given to

problems arising from differences of culture, lexis and grammar. Most of the examples chosen reflect the Indonesian situation in which the writer has been living for the past eight years. It is clear that the degree of difficulty in attaining translation equivalence is closely related to the amount of context available. Thus if we take two texts in different languages, one being a translation of the other, equivalence would be virtually impossible to achieve at the level of the morpheme. Even at the word level we can seldom hope that a particular word in the ST can always be translated by the same word in the TL. It is normally at the sentence level that there can be some realistic expectation of achieving equivalence. Thus while some loss of meaning in translation is inevitable, the richer the context the less the loss. A written text such as the Bible has become de-contextualized in the sense that we cannot expect helpful clues from the context of situation in the way we can with spoken messages. Nevertheless the structure and extent of the biblical corpus is such that the linguistic environment itself (co-text) provides a vast amount of historical and cultural information necessary for a successful understanding and translation of its message.

If we were to single out the sociological factor that has had the deepest influence on the history of language, religion would no doubt qualify. Most languages have as their earliest written document a religious text. This is just as true of ancient Akkadian, Hittite and Sanskrit as it is for the countless tongues of tribal peoples in Africa, Latin America and Austronesia for whom Bible translations are being produced. We have seen that unlike other faiths, Christianity has from the start been a translating religion so that most of Europe's languages have as their first written document a translation of the Bible; a situation which is being repeated today in hundreds

of tribal languages.

In Bible translation, as in translation of other literature, there are basically two quite different approaches. The first says that the finished product should read like an original creation in the TL. The other focuses on the meaning of the ST rather than on successful communication, forcing the reader back into the alien world of the author. Traditionally the second approach has prevailed in Bible translation, probably because the version functions as an authoritative replacement of the ST unlike its counterparts in Judaism and Islam which are regarded merely as aids to understanding. However, Chaim Rabin has drawn attention to a new trend in Bible translation which he attributes to the influence of Eugene Nida's Dynamic Equivalence theory of translation.

Nida himself has confessed his debt to various different linguistic models (Nida 1975a:272). Accordingly, before examining DE theory we gave some brief consideration to four major linguistic "schools" to which Nida himself pays tribute, viz. Tagmemics, Stratificational grammar, Generative-transformational grammar and Halliday's Systemic grammar.

Discussion of the merits of rival Bible translations is so often befogged by the use of opaque terms such as "accurate", "faithful", "free", "sober", "reliable", etc. In Section II we turned to Nida's writings seeking a more objective metalanguage for evaluating translations. More than that we looked, too, for a comprehensive account of the translation process that does justice to the complexity of language structure and the problem of "equivalence in difference".

The name of Eugene Nida dominates the literature on translation theory (Newmark 1976:11). He has designated his approach as a Sociolinguistic theory of translation. In this way he differentiates

his treatment not only from the philological tradition in translation (e.g. Belloc 1931, Brower 1974, Goethe 1827, Nabakov 1955, Tytler 1790) but also from other Linguistic theories (e.g. Catford 1965, Jakobson 1959, Vinay and Darbelnet 1958). Nida values the more scientific analysis of the linguistic approaches but regards them as inadequate in so far as they treat the texts as objects in and of themselves, more or less unrelated to actual communication events. For him, translation is an act of communication and so the capacities, interests and presuppositions of the receptors primarily account for the success or failure of any translation, and therefore largely determine the formal features any satisfactory translation must possess.

This critique of Nida's Dynamic Equivalence theory takes account of most of his writings but is based primarily on the volume The Theory and Practice of Translation (1969) or TAPOT, which is a manual for translators (Charles R. Taber is co-author). This choice stems not only from the systematic presentation found in that book but also because Nida himself regards it as the best summary of his theory (in Anwar S. Dil ed. 1975:221). The first two chapters of TAPOT expound the new concept of translation in broad terms. Subsequent chapters take up in systematic order the fundamental procedures that are being recommended; grammatical and semantic analysis, transfer, restructuring, and testing.

Translation, for Nida, consists in reproducing in the receptor language (RL) the closest natural equivalent of the source-language (SL) message. Bible translation is no different. The best translation does not sound like a translation. Furthermore, the receptor-orientation of DE theory and the emphasis on successful communication is said to accord with the attitude of the biblical writers themselves. An

important assumption of DE Bible translation is that the New Testament writers expected to be understood. That is why they used the common language - the so-called Koine Greek. Therefore, unless an ambiguity in the text is linguistically marked, the translator should not ride the fence but opt for the most likely interpretation. In seeking natural equivalents, however, the translator must not distort the historical and cultural context of Scripture which is an integral part of its message. "Jerusalem" cannot be replaced by "Washington D.C." "Demon possessed" cannot be translated "mentally distressed". Having given that warning, TAPOT expounds four fundamental priorities, before describing in more detail the processes of analysis and transfer. The four priorities of DE theory are that:

1. Contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency
2. Dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence
3. The aural form of the language has priority over the written form
4. Forms that are used by and acceptable to the audience have priority over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious.

The central problem in the theory and practice of translation is to specify the nature and conditions of translation equivalence (Catford 1965:21). Clearly what counts as equivalence will be influenced by one's theory of language, by the purpose of the translation and by the model of linguistic description used in the translation process. Nida himself stresses the informational and the instrumental functions of language whereby it is a means of inducing a response in the hearer (reader). His translation model advocates evaluation on the basis of equivalent response on the part of the receptors. This is, as we have seen, an impossible goal. We know nothing of the response of the original readers of the NT documents.

In describing his processes of Grammatical analysis, Nida rejects any approach to translation which applies its rules to 'surface structure' only. A grammatical surface structure may be ambiguous in that there are two or more possible underlying patterns of relations (cf. Chomsky's "flying planes can be dangerous"), and expressions which have similar grammatical form may involve quite different underlying semantic relations. Nida's utilization of neo-Chomskian processes of analysis to probe beneath the surface structure of phrases and sentences, thereby making possible a genuine semantic equivalence, has much of value. Applied to the genitive construction in Greek, it has been particularly fruitful. A translator is likely to encounter this construction twice in every three verses of the NT and it can signal various types of semantic structures and relations (e.g. "love of God", "faith of Christ", "word of truth" etc.). However, Nida's analyses and explications are not without a subjective element, and one cannot help but be uneasy about an approach which claims to have discovered the four universal semantic categories (viz. object, event, relation, abstract) and the seven primitive English kernels.

Evaluation of Nida's semantics will be largely dependent on one's assessment of the value of componential analysis. Componential analysis assumes that each lexical unit is composed of a certain number of semantic components and that the words of a language can be grouped into semantic domains. The treatment in TAPOT is characteristically lucid and interesting, presenting a wealth of linguistic insights reflecting a life-long acquaintance with a variety of practical problems that confront a director of a Society for Bible translation. Although Nida's basic theoretical orientation at this point is of the generative semantic type he has fortunately abandoned the use of complicated tree diagrams in presenting linguistic data, and his

componential analysis would seem to be a potentially useful tool for defining the differences between respective meanings. No doubt it does make possible new methods of presentation for a single language or bilingual lexicography which orders the semantic features of words in a hierarchical-relational way. Nida rightly emphasizes the importance of specifying context in semantic description, but his own treatment is marred by failure at this point. Even where the linguistic environment of the term under discussion is specified, he sometimes slides from the Hebrew and Greek texts to the English version on the assumption (undemonstrated) that the word in the English translation can be explained in terms of the underlying ST. Again there is a failure to do justice to real verbal concordance in the ST, and what is arguably technical terminology is dissipated according to the nuance deemed to be uppermost in the various contexts. Those of more philosophical bent might well question the 'cognitive reality' of semantic components (cf. Lyons 1968:477). The usefulness of the metalanguage provided is doubtful too, if, as one suspects, the semantic components seem to be interpreted on the basis of the linguist's intuitive understanding of the lexical items which he uses to label them. Certainly, as we have sought to show, the examples of analysis presented in TAPOT are not free of subjectivity.

Nida's final chapters dealing with Transfer, Restructure and Testing contain a wealth of information and authoritative practical advice. One never doubts that this is the work of a master practitioner. And yet when one comes to passages expounding the theory of translation, one is left profoundly dissatisfied. In view of the author's self-confessed eclecticism with regard to models of linguistic description, one is not surprised if there is some lack of theoretical coherence.

But one does not expect to read that "words may be regarded essentially as vehicles for carrying the components of meaning" (Nida 1975a:91) or that transferring the message in translation "is a bit like packing clothing into two different pieces of luggage: the clothes remain the same, but the shape of the suitcases may vary greatly, and hence the way in which the clothes are packed must be different" (TAPOT:105). In view of such disparagement of the significance of the form of the original text it is not surprising that one finds restructurings being recommended that are far more radical than the norms of the TL itself demands and that sometimes amount to a rewrite of the ST (as we have seen in the case of e.g. Mark 1:4).

Translation theory, then, must not undervalue the complex relationship between form and meaning. The translator does not work with disembodied meanings. He is struggling to establish correspondences between expressions of the different languages involved. He can only operate with these expressions and not with wordless ideas. In this respect Catford's A Linguistic Theory of Translation (1965), while highly technical and less interesting, is superior to Nida's presentation. It provides the kind of comprehensive and scientific account of the translation process that we look for in a linguistic theory of translation.

In Section III we sought to examine and evaluate the Good News Bible or Today's English Version (TEV), not only because of its phenomenal acceptance over against other modern versions, but more so because it represents a conscious attempt to implement Nida's DE theory of translation, and as such has been commended by Nida himself. A full chapter of this section was devoted to a brief history of English Bible translation since no translation of the Scriptures can be undertaken or evaluated without due regard to its predecessors in the field - not least because such antecedents influence the attitudes of

the receptors whose favourable response is so important in DE theory. This history we noted has revealed two dominant trends: the constant appearance of new translations on the one hand, and the continuing fascination of an archaic masterpiece in the King James Version (1611) on the other. The KJV has continued to be the measuring rod for aspiring rivals.

Nida himself has commended the KJV, noting correctly that it eschews literalism and in the "Preface to the Reader" it specifically advocates the twin qualities that he, too, seeks to promote: readability and accuracy. The problem is that these terms are not self-defining. The recent proliferation of new translations which abandon the formal register of solemn worship and recital in favour of the informal style of the mass media shows that a drastic change has occurred in the popular understanding of what a translation is meant to accomplish. The translators of the KJV showed considerable flexibility, especially in their usage of a variety of synonyms which contributed to its generally excellent literary style as over against the Revised Version (1881) that was supposed to replace it but which was doomed to failure by its wooden literalism. Nevertheless, no one could ever claim that the KJV was a DE translation. It was not written in popular everyday English. Its style was already archaic, possibly deliberately so, at the time of publication. Just as the New Testament itself was written in a kind of Jewish Greek, so the English of the KJV reproduced not only semitic idioms but also many Hebrew grammatical features. In particular, for our purposes, whatever flexibility the translators showed in rendering indifferent diction, they were careful to reproduce important verbal concordances from the ST. Thus the reader of the KJV New Testament constantly comes across the technical terminology used by the writers reflecting their

assumption that the significance of the message of Jesus could only be grasped from an awareness of the religious traditions and cultus of Israel.

The TEV enjoys extraordinary popular appeal. This is due firstly to its substantial intrinsic merits as a common language translation, and secondly to its excellent format, its section headings, outstanding illustrations, useful word list and index. Its main translator, Dr. Robert Bratcher, has consciously sought to implement Nida's DE theory - "a translation attempts not only to communicate the same meaning as did the original text, but also to evoke from its readers the same reaction aroused by the original text from its readers" (Bratcher 1978:147). DE proponents explain that every common language translation is a DE translation, though not vice versa (Ellingworth 1972:223). But it could be argued in response that the two are incompatible. If the wide variety of literary style and technical terminology of the original cannot be conveyed in the limited vocabulary of Common English then there is no hope of achieving that equivalence of receptor response that Nida aims for.

While this point gains credence from the material presented in Section IV (viz. with regard to the language of the NT and to the fate of technical terminology), this thesis seeks to advance a more fundamental criticism. It is not merely that the TEV fails to exemplify DE principles perfectly but that the DE model itself is wrong-headed insofar as it reflects an inadequate theory of language and an inappropriate definition of equivalence.

Our own evaluation has suggested that the justly celebrated intelligibility of the TEV has not been without cost in terms of semantic loss. It is a simpler and more lucid translation that makes the Bible easier to understand, partly at the expense of there being

less to understand. Difficult OT technical terminology that the NT writers utilized to express their understanding of the gospel of Jesus (e.g. the terminology of temple, sacrifice, exodus, redemption) tends to be dissipated in simplified paraphrases more intelligible to the modern receptor. But this kind of terminology provides vital signposts to the "universe of discourse" or presuppositions of the NT writers and most of their original readers. The removal of this biblical salvation vocabulary is one of the most crucial points at which the TEV and other DE translations part company with the tradition of English Bible translation hitherto.

Admittedly our own treatment has tended to be negative and to concentrate on the deficiencies of the translation. This is partly because its strong points (e.g. its communicativeness) are obvious, but more particularly because of concern to reject or qualify some of the exaggerated claims made for the TEV by Nida. The TEV is often more boldly interpretative than FC translations which seek to keep the ambivalence of the ST. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It depends on the purpose of the translation - something which is not decided on linguistic grounds. Thus decisions as to whether a translation is for scholarly, liturgical, missionary, or private reading purposes, fall outside the competence of the linguist. The TEV translators, in accordance with DE theory, have adopted a policy of choosing the most likely meaning where a word or construction in the ST may be open to several interpretations or nuances.

Such a policy may be particularly suitable for missionary purposes, or for private reading as an aid to Bible study. On the other hand, it might be regarded as an undesirable policy for a version that is to be used as a study Bible, or in liturgical reading, or as a basis for teaching. The linguist can only draw attention to the consequences of

such decisions. Following Lachermeyer, we have argued that ambiguity that is generally avoided in scientific language, and tolerated in conventional language, is an essential ingredient in literary language systems and is a major device for evoking feeling. We have drawn attention to such expressions in the teaching of Jesus. Nida has failed to reckon with this feature of literary language and in removing all ambiguous expressions from translation, gets rid of a significant device of eliciting the very reader response that looms so large in his translation theory.

In Section IV two problems were singled out for special attention. Firstly, we examined one of Nida's basic assumptions often quoted to justify the concentration on common language versions, namely that the New Testament writings were written in the Greek of the man in the street. That viewpoint, popular earlier this century as a result of Adolf Deissmann's comparative studies on Egyptian papyri, is now seen to have been overstated. Research over the past thirty years has drawn attention to the Semitic cast of the language of the NT. To what extent this represents the influence of the Septuagint, or the Hebrew-Aramaic mother tongue of the writers, or is a special dialect of Jewish Greek, cannot yet be determined with certainty. The point is, we cannot assume that this Hebraized Greek was "natural" even for the writers of the NT, let alone for the original receptors, many of whom were Gentiles who must often have winced at the Semitisms (just as indigenous Indonesians often ridicule the peculiar Indonesian dialect spoken by members of the Chinese diaspora).

The second problem, dealt with in Chapter 13, was the significance of technical terminology in the NT and the need to reproduce in the RL real verbal concordance in the ST. The study focused on a particular group of cultic words, the hilaskesthai (propitiation/atonement) terms

which had a long history of usage in the Greek Bible or Septuagint. This detailed word study sought to avoid the pitfalls pointed out by James Barr by giving full value to context and synchronic description. The ST was seen to confront the translator with a concatenation of ideas which, however foreign or repugnant to the modern mind, are vital to that text's interpretation - sacrifice, blood, propitiation. DE translations, such as the TEV, that drop such cultic terminology in favour of a general paraphrase more intelligible to the modern reader, obliterate the concordance in the ST and deprives him of access to the "universe of discourse" of the NT writers.

The point of these two studies was not to denigrate translations which aim at good, natural English. Intelligibility is highly desirable but it must not be absolutized. One cannot escape the fact that the Bible contains many concepts and expressions which are difficult for the modern reader. There is no evidence that they were much less so for the original readers (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). They, too, had to cope with technical terminology, with thousands of OT allusions and with Hebrew loan words, idioms and translation that must have been very strange to many of them. Nida draws on communication theory to underline the concept of the "channel capacity" of receptors, that must not be overloaded. His warning is salutary, especially where the translators are theologians whose own familiarity with the ST often blinds them to the problems encountered by ordinary readers who do not share their knowledge of the SL. But channel capacity must not be thought of as something rigid and inflexible, but rather as something elastic that can be stretched and broadened. The modern reader who is presented with a Bible in the language of his pulp novel will have been deprived of much that not only puzzled its first readers, but also arrested and challenged them.

One final issue which calls for further investigation is the whole question of the extent of cultural adaptation that can be justified in Bible translation. Every text reflects elements peculiar to its own natural environment, institutions and culture. Some loss of meaning is inevitable in the process of substitution or replacement in the RL. The problem looms far larger in the translation of an ancient text such as the Bible than it does with material such as mathematical studies or scientific experiments where there are practically no specific local features. Much depends too on the purpose of the translation but Nida himself has warned against "cultural transposition" in the translation of the Bible and his own writings have provided some useful guidelines on how to handle cultural adaptation. He has drawn attention to the difference between historical material and illustrative material, between frequently repeated and specific events, between imagery which is central in the Bible and that which is peripheral. These principles have all been well illustrated by examples from hundreds of varying languages and situations. On the whole these principles have been sensibly utilized in the TEV's handling of cultural adaptation. However, we have noted a potential problem in DE theory where the terminology or categories of Scripture are repugnant to modern readers (e.g. "sexist language", "jealousy", or "propitiation" ascribed to God). According to the DE model the translation is a failure if it does not evoke a response similar to that assumed for the original readers. But as one DE theorist has confessed, the situations and presuppositions of the original receptors were so different from those of today's readers that equivalent impact cannot be hoped for unless the strange historical context of the ST is replaced by something more meaningful to the modern reader. At this point the notion of translation has merged into that of communica-

tion and its utility (especially for translating an ancient sacred text such as the Bible) is doubtful (cf. Crystal 1976:327). We have observed one area where the TEV's cultural conditioning badly skews the message of the ST namely in its handling of terminology referring to Israel and the Jewish context of the documents. In a number of places this terminology is replaced by general references to "the people of God" or "the chosen people" presumably so that the modern reader senses the application to himself. In other places the constant insertion of "Jewish" (e.g. before "priest", "law", "temple") changes the atmosphere of the message to such an extent that one feels that what is being described was as alien to the original writer and his readers as it is to the modern Gentile receptor. This insensitivity to important "cultural nodes" of the ST is the kind of weakness one would expect to find in a translation based on the DE model. A preliminary examination of DE counterparts of the TEV, in Indonesian, Malay, French, Javanese and Dutch suggests that only the Dutch version avoids this mishandling of such significant cultural material. I have been told by the UBS translation consultant for Indonesia that new DE translations of the OT in preparation for regional languages are reducing the many references to Israel because of the unfavourable connotations in an Islamic context.¹ This again illustrates the irreconcilable claims of semantic content and reader response.

With regard to the practice of translation there is no richer source of wisdom than the writings of Eugene Nida. His books and articles reflect his imaginative and indefatigable efforts to make available, for Bible translators especially, insights from linguistics and the social sciences. A great communicator himself, Nida's

¹Conversation with Dr. Daniel Arichea, 22 January, 1981.

sociolinguistic translation model has highlighted the importance of the Receptor in the translation process, by drawing attention to the way his capacities, attitudes and presuppositions determine the acceptability of a translation. That focus is particularly salutary for theologians and biblical scholars who, it must be admitted, are often the last to appreciate the difficulties experienced by the uninitiated when confronted by translations of literal tendency. Moreover, in The Theory and Practice of Translation (1969), Nida has presented certain processes for clarifying semantic relationships and for analysis of meaning components which, carefully used, would prove useful tools not only to the translator but to all biblical interpreters. What needs to be stressed, however, is that the translator needs more than a science of analysis. Our culture, dominated as it is by technical and the analytic, is profoundly unpoetic. The translator of literature such as the Bible needs sensitivity to the power of words and style and particularly to the use of imagery that expands the horizon, and, in the case of some of the terminology we have drawn attention to, establishes a mental and emotional network rather than a one-to-one connection. Translation involves art as well as science. "No popular acclaim can stamp the value of a translation any more than of a vase or a new piece of music." (Newmark 1976:23).

Finally, though we have commended Nida as the master practitioner of translation, we have not been able to accept his Dynamic Equivalence theory particularly as it relates to Bible translation. Translation is an operation involving languages. This being the case, any theory of translation must draw on a theory of language. DE theory cannot provide the comprehensive account of the translation process that we seek, firstly because Nida's 'vehicular concept' of meaning does not do justice to the complexity of language and to the signifi-

cance of form. Secondly, his translation model defines equivalence in terms of the response of the receptors. Though any evaluation of a Bible translation must take into account its purpose and the intended audience, the receptor in DE theory is granted such a determinative role that the concept of translation can no longer be distinguished from the more general notion of communication. Even if one were able to measure the reaction of the original readers of the NT documents, one could not hope to stimulate the same response in the modern reader since the presuppositional background is so completely different.

There is no linguistic consensus on the definition of translation-al equivalence. It can be inferred from the criticisms of Nida above that our own definition would have a semantic, rather than a receptor-response focus. A translation of the Bible, in principle, should aim to retain as far as possible the exegetical potential of the source text. This would mean in practice that a good translation of the NT will preserve a sense of historical and cultural distance. It will take the modern reader back into the alien milieu of first century Judaism where the Christian movement began. It will show him how the gospel of Jesus appeared to a Jew, and not how that Jew would have thought had he been an Australian or an American (Robinson 1979:2).

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Appendix

Due to copyright reasons the following appendix has been omitted from this thesis.

Appendix: The New Testament of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, translated out of the original Greek and with the former translations diligently compared and revised, set forth in 1611, and commonly known as the King James Version (pp. 255-281)