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Book Review

Bible Translation: Frames of Reference

Edited by Timothy Wilt

Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2003. Pp. 294. Paper $39.00. ISBN 1900650568.

Reviewed by Ralph Hill[1]
SIL International

Bible Translation: Frames of Reference provides a long-needed update on current trends and thought relating to Bible translation in recent years. From the introduction we are told that it attempts to offer "…a book providing a general perspective on Bible translation at the turn of the twenty-first century, in part by indicating important developments since the appearance of TAPOT (Nida and Tabor's *Theory and Practice of Translation*).

An ambitious undertaking perhaps, but six UBS translation consultants collaborate to satisfy that objective well. The book contains six chapters authored by each of the contributors and a conclusion by the editor. Following that are a set of six appendices on training materials and course outlines as well as a list of references and useful index. The introduction provides a concise summary of each chapter. A very nice job on the layout by St. Jerome Publishing results in an enjoyable and easy-to-read presentation.

Over the past fifty years there has been considerable water under the bridge since Eugene Nida and his contemporaries defined the dynamic equivalence, and later, the functional equivalence, approach to Bible translation. In the lead off chapter, Aloo Mojola provides an extremely helpful overview concerning the thoughts and trends characterizing "two eras," i.e., that of dynamic equivalence and the present era of "translation studies." The latter is characterized by a much more diverse offering of approaches dealing with the complexities of Bible translation. Due respect is paid to great pioneers like Nida and others for breaking significant ground in the form-meaning distinction and the development of techniques for translating meaning between languages very different one from another. There is a frank assessment of some of the naïve theoretical assumptions regarding communication that were current during this era, such as the "code model" (Shannon and Weaver, 1947) or the "fallacy of the conduit metaphor" (critiqued by Reddy already in 1979, Frawley 1987), as well as the rather simplistic portrayal of translation in terms of a dichotomy between formal correspondence versus dynamic equivalence. Various critiques of dynamic equivalence by specialists such as Robinson, Venuti and others through the ensuing years are evaluated. With great respect to the past, one can now refer to being in a post-Nida era. Nida was a trailblazer, but the trail has become a highway (p.10).

In the same chapter Ernst Wendland looks at various perspectives from the current era of "translation studies," seen now as an autonomous discipline. Six sections describe various contemporary translation approaches (functionalist, descriptive, text-linguistic, relevance theoretic, post-colonial, literalist and the tendency to over-domesticate). Each is necessarily quite brief, but adequately descriptive. Wendland covers the subject of literary functional equivalence in more depth in the sixth chapter of the book.

In the second chapter, Translation and Communication, Timothy Wilt describes the translation task as dependent upon a much more complex combination of factors than previously captured in the simple Sender-Message-Receiver portrayal, which was characteristic of the code or conduit models of communication. Perspectives from cognitive linguistics and other models are brought to bear on what is perhaps the core idea of the book, that there are many factors that shape a translation *scopos* or purpose. Each can be described using the metaphor of a *frame.* Thus there are cognitive frames, sociocultural frames, organizational and communication situation frames. Each of these contributes in different ways to shaping the objectives of a given translation product design, as well as the criteria with which is it to be evaluated. We need no longer to expect there is only one right "divine way" of translating. Graphically,

[1] This review was first published in *The Bible Translator, Practical Papers* 56/4 October, 2005, 268–271.

translation is described as an *exchange* where the speaker "selects and sends" a message via a text (signs) and a hearer "perceives and selects" the message from the text. This differs from the classic code model in that the hearer is no longer a passive recipient of a totally clear and unambiguous message, but rather what the hearer brings to the act of communication also determines what will be understood.

In passing, I might note that there is no further elaboration on just how the hearer might successfully manage to "perceive and select" the right components of a vast and ambiguous range of meanings potentially suggested by "the signs" provided by the speaker. Stated otherwise, how is it that "context" really works to guide one to the right interpretation? This particular area is precisely the one that relevance theory attempts to account for: bridging the gap between what is said and what is meant, through a process of inference. Certainly, a full accounting of the "meaning" we must translate must draw upon pragmatic inference (language *use* in a specific context) and cognition (how we think and use memory). In a note, Wilt does give recognition to the contributions of relevance theory and cognitive linguistics in offering better explanations for the "inside-the-head" aspects of how meaning is negotiated (p. 44). Further, there is a helpful graphic representation of the important differences between "easy" communication situations (where there is common ground between communicator and audience) and "difficult" communication situations typical of Bible translation, where the second audience with a different sociocultural background, experiences a text composed for an original audience that is far removed by time and culture. There are occasional references throughout the book to the problem of bridging that gap.

In the third chapter, Robert Bascom continues to elaborate on the use of frames and framing to account for the role of culture in translation. Drawing upon Katan's (1999) *Translating Culture* and Lakoff's (1987) *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things,* Bascom illustrates how it is important for translators as cross-cultural communicators to recognize how the human categorization of experience and extensive use of metaphor impact one's understanding of scripture, as well as potential solutions for translation. The concept of a "boundedness" frame is applied to differences in lexicalization between languages, examining several key terms from the OT, including the pervasive notions of holiness and pollution, and sickness and healing in the NT.

Ron Ross, in the fourth chapter provides an extremely helpful overview of major linguistic trends in the last few decades that have direct impact on translation. Metaphor and spatial orientation are examined in the context of universalism versus relativity. I found especially helpful the overview of linguistic typology (constituent order, grammatical, semantic) as well as cross cultural semantics and the conceptual diversity of human languages (Wierzbicka). A section of pragmatics covered Grice and several valid weaknesses of Gricean claims. Historically this has value, but Gricean pragmatics has been eclipsed by relevance theory, which addresses these very issues much more convincingly; thus I felt a little too much time was devoted to Grice at the expense of some very valuable contributions that relevance theory holds for cross-cultural communication. That aside, these and more topics (sociolinguistics, discourse, information structure) provide an excellent overview of a rather vast domain of knowledge.

In the fifth chapter, Graham Ogden furnishes a sweeping survey of exegetical and hermeneutical trends that impact translation. The first section covers eight topics such as lexical studies (and tools), historical-critical studies and archeology, various critical approaches (source, redaction, canonical), intertestamental studies and intertextuality. The discussion is replete with bibliographic pointers to recent key works in these areas. The second section covers several recent trends in interpretation: reader-response, feminist approaches, indigenous and post-colonial studies, to name just a few. Ogden's survey provides a nice complement to Ross' coverage of linguistics.

A final chapter by Ernst Wendland does a splendid job of covering several literary aspects of Bible translation that have been inadequately handled in previous translation approaches focused on content alone. The Bible has long been recognized as literature, but seldom translated in a way that fully appreciates the diversity of literary genre included. Functional equivalence is distinguished from its earlier predecessor dynamic equivalence, and then the notion of *LiFE* or literary functional equivalence is given birth to capture those literary aspects previously ignored in the earlier approaches.

Wendland illustrates nine important stylistic aspects occurring frequently in biblical texts. Their significance is explained, both for understanding the full connotative and affective import of author-

intended meaning, as well as finding appropriate ways to convey such meaning in the translation process. Given the enormity of the subject, the treatment of each aspect is necessarily limited in scope. However, the chapter manages to provide an excellent introduction to the problem. Obviously, the looming challenge is in training translators to handle literary features successfully. We have on the near horizon the forthcoming works *Translating the Literature of Scripture* (Wendland), and *Scripture Frames and Framing: A Pedagogical Manual* (Wendland and Wilt), both attempting to address that very need. We look forward to their appearance with eagerness. [2]

The introduction of *Frames of Reference* states that the primary audience envisioned are consultants-in-training. There is no doubt the book will prove valuable for this audience. I would hasten to add that it should be equally valuable to every translator who is able to read English at this level, as well as to current consultants who, due to their isolation in remote areas, have not be not been able to keep abreast of the sweeping trends of the last few decades.

We are grateful to the editor and each contributor for a significant contribution to the cause of Bible translation.

[2] Since this review was written, Wendland's *Translating the Literature of Scripture* has been published by SIL (2005).