SIL Global
Language and Culture Archives

Journal of Translation
ISSN 1558-7282 (online)
https://siljot.org

Book review

Review of: Contextual Frames of Reference in Translation, by Ernst Wendland

Fritz Goerling

Journal of Translation 4 (1), 2008: 23–25.
https://doi.org/10.54395/JOT-KKVEY

License

©2008, SIL Global

Made available under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0

More resources available at:
https://sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives

Book Review

Contextual Frames of Reference in Translation: A Coursebook for Bible Translators and Teachers.

By Ernst Wendland

St. Jerome Publishing Manchester, UK & Northampton MA. ISBN 978-1-906763-02-3. 344pp.
Published: 2008. Paperback £22.50.

Reviewed by Fritz Goerling
SIL International Translation Consultant

In the Preface (xv) to this coursebook the author says: "Communicative Bible translation is at the same time a science, a technology, and an art. Thus it is (or should be) based on generally accepted knowledge derived from interdisciplinary sources as well as extended observation, study, and experimentation; it operates according to specific, experience-based principles and practical procedures; and equally important if not always recognized, it is at some point also carried out *intuitively*, in response to the artistic genius and sensitivity of the translator. It is the primary aim of *Contextual frames of reference in Bible translation* to provide translators and their trainers alike with a heuristic framework for exploring all three of these key dimensions of translation, with primary reference to the Christian Scriptures. I thereby wish to encourage a more broadly-based perspective on this multifaceted task and, to this end, also provide translation staff with the opportunity to progressively practice as well as to reflect upon these insights in relation to their own specific sociocultural setting and work situation.

This coursebook offers a practical, step by step way to follow up on some of the main ideas that are presented in the influential text *Bible translation: Frames of reference* (Timothy Wilt 2003)."

This step-by-step procedure can be followed in the order of the lessons presented in twelve chapters:

In chapter 1, 'Contextual frames of reference: The mind's construction of meaning,' the author introduces the analogy of an onion as a heuristic device when investigating the idea of *context*. He distinguishes different cognitive layers moving from the most generic to the more specific: cognitive › sociocultural › organizational › situational › textual. In chapters 2 to 6, these pragmatic *frames of reference* are described and illustrated. Chapter 1 further demonstrates the dynamic interaction of frames. The latter part of the chapter discusses three pragmatic factors, viz. prominence, perspective, and perceptibility, which need to be taken into account when using the "frames" contextual model for exploring any situation of communication.

In chapter 2, 'The context of the mind: Cognitive frames of reference,' dimensions of world-view, culturally conditioned cognitive perspectives, cognitive filters, cognitive environment and grid-group perspective are discussed and exemplified.

Chapter 3 entitled 'Why we do things the way we do: Sociocultural frames' addresses the following subjects: The constraint of "custom;" High-context versus low-context communication; Mental representations; Semantic domains; Discerning the fitting frame; Gender bias; Signs make meaning in context.

Chapter 4 entitled 'The rights and responsibilities of allegiance: Organizational frames' deals with the following subjects: 'What is an organization?,' 'Empowering the organization,' 'Competing organizations.'

In Chapter 5, 'Situational frames: Communicating in different circumstances,' the author presents a sociolinguistic model to describe the "situational" frame of reference for any discourse. The chapter is further subdivided in 'Speech-act analysis,' 'Assessing the audience,' and 'The underlying "text" of a situational context.'

Chapter 6 'Textual frames of reference: The pervasive influence of intertext' treats the following subjects: 'Intertextuality and genre markers,' 'Examples of intertextual influence,' 'The intertextual pressure of a

prior translation,' 'Primary versus secondary (and tertiary) translations,' 'Which "text"? The need for textual criticism,' and 'Textual support of the canon.'

Chapter 7 'Intratextuality: A text's internal frame of reference' focuses on **'**Literary hermeneutical clues (genre specification, compositional disjunction, patterned recursion, artistic-rhetorical accentuation, phonic enhancement)' and 'Formatting the textual form.'

In Chapter 8, 'Framing John's vision of the heavenly throne room (Rev. 4),' the author applies the analytical framework presented in the first seven chapters to a selected text Rev. 4, in order to demonstrate how a multiple "frames of reference" perspective can enhance our understanding of the biblical text and its translation. To whet the reader's appetite for this rich and most practical chapter, here is its full contents:

The general cognitive environment of Revelation 4

The ANE milieu of Revelation: Its sociocultural and organizational frames

The situational setting of John: Apostle, pastor, prophet

The conceptual context presupposed by the throne room vision

The formal representation of Rev. 4: Textual frames

Co-text: Demarcating the pericope beginning at 4:1

A literary analysis of the text

Categorization: What is the genre of Revelation?

Articulation: How was the original text proclaimed?

Disjunction: How is the discourse demarcated into segments?

Recursion: What syntagmatic and paradigmatic patterns appear?

Accentuation: How is the text artistically and rhetorically heightened?

Varied intertextual notes and chords resound in Revelation 4 (5)

In chapter 9, 'Sharpening John's vision for contemporary Chewa text auditors,' the author applies the preceding analysis of chapter 8 to a contemporary society, the Chewa people in Malawi and Zambia. Methods of contextualizing the translation are discussed by how two widely used versions in the Chewa language have translated Rev. 4:6b-11. In addition, the author proposes a literary functional equivalence (oratorical equivalence) translation, i.e., a translation in a more vivid, idiomatic vernacular style. The final section of this chapter deals with 'Paratextual and extratextual tools for enriching one's frame of reference' to make the text more relevant not only through textual but also paratextual and extratextual strategies.

Chapter 10 entitled 'Evaluating the overall quality of communication via translation' treats the following subjects: 'Applying a multiple framework for qualitative assessment,' 'Assessing a specific conceptual context of text reception, 'Problems with "the powers": A case-study of recontextualization,' and 'The need for a relevant contextualization.'

Chapter 11 is intended to be a practical assignment for readers to apply (flexibly) the methodology outlined in chapter 8 to Revelation 5. The author guides the reader in this exercise by a number of questions.

In the final chapter 12, 'Creating a contextualized framework for teaching and learning,' he gives thought **'**Towards a more setting-sensitive pedagogy (as interactive, inductive, indigenized, communal, developmental, comparative, applied),' to 'The power of dialogue-based, student-centered education,' 'A process model for translator training,' and 'Expanding the teaching-learning context through networking.'

In this final "lesson," the author summarizes and underscores his own approach of "teaching and learning *together*"(p. 272), adopted so admirably throughout this coursebook. Ernst Wendland is an experienced seminary classroom instructor as well as a Bible translation field consultant-trainer. He is a consummate

writer and communicator who has shown his remarkable pedagogical skills in a number of publications. I just want to mention *Analyzing the Psalms: With exercises for Bible students and translators* (SIL Dallas 1998) through which I have worked myself and with groups as a teacher of Hebrew poetry to Bible translators. As in the latter book, in the coursebook under review each theoretical part of a chapter is interspersed with or followed by ample exercices and stimulating questions. These invite and engage the reader to think through the multifaceted issues presented, internalize the principles, and critically interact with the whole material which the author calls "a work-in-progress."

The author dedicates the book to Bible scholars like Katy Barnwell, Jake Loewen and Gene Nida who "impressed upon him the importance of translator training and im- pressively modeled their methods in the classroom as teachers." He also gives credit to his students and class participants who helped improve the coursebook by comments, queries and constructive criticism. He invites further feedback to erwendland@hotmail.com or wendland@zamnet.zm.

It would be helpful to have read *Bible translation: Frames of reference* (Wilt 2003) before working individually or in groups through Wendland's *Contextual frames of reference in translation: A coursebook for Bible translators and teachers*. The former book presents the ideas, principles and perspectives of "frames of reference" which are explained in more detail and applied in the latter coursebook through practical examples and exercises in order to render the material more interactive and relevant to a particular receptor context.

As one chapter builds upon another, I recommend to work through the coursebook in the order given, even for those who are familiar with Wilt's *Bible translation: Frames of reference.* The coursebook, although intended to be an *advanced* course on Bible translation (e.g. for experienced translators or team exegetes), is still heavy on theory in the usually compact introductory part of each chapter (or subdivision of it) with lots of technical terminology with which readers need to familiarize themselves before they can interact with the exercises and study questions. The author presupposes or introduces the reader to useful insights from a wide number of disciplines, perspectives and approaches, each with their particular terminology (like cultural anthropology, relevance theory, literary-rhetorical approach to translation) . This integration is fully appropriate to the complex task of Bible translation and makes the coursebook an extremely stimulating, challenging and horizon-expanding book! It fully achieves its goal as stated by the author in the Preface to the coursebook (xv): "… this coursebook intends to broaden translators' field of vision—their 'frames of reference'—with regard to the conceptual and pragmatic scope of their task in relation to the original text and, on the other hand, to lead them to apply this vision with more focused clarity and conviction to their specific work situation, ideally in close interaction with colleagues in a 'team' approach to the task."