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Dynamic Equivalence and Its Daughters: Placing Bible Translation Theories in Their Historical Context

Glenn J. Kerr

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Abstract

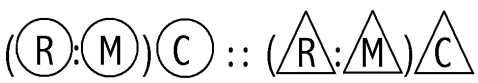
The Bible translation theory called "dynamic equivalence" from the middle of the twentieth century was more than what may be called the first definable theory of Bible translation. Indirectly or directly, it spawned or related to seven other specific theories: meaning-based translation, cultural equivalence or transculturation, complete equivalence, optimal equivalence, closest natural equivalence, functional equivalence, and *skopostheorie*. Even the term formal equivalence originated during this time. Later in the same period, the code model of communication on which dynamic equivalence was based was challenged by the inference model of relevance theory. All this theoretical writing and postulating has been paralleled by or related to developments in the world of general translation theory and science. Oftentimes these theories have been studied in isolation; this paper, in contrast, examines those theories in their historical context, analyzing their core ideas and how they relate to each other. Concurrently we focus on who the originators of the theories are, and what Bible translation organizations have used them. The study concludes with a practical discussion of what knowing and using these theories might mean in the real world context of Bible translating.

1. A New Concept of Translating

In 1969 Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber published a book on Bible translation entitled *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Chapter one was entitled "A New Concept of Translating." This book was the successor to a book published five years earlier by Eugene Nida with the title *Toward a Science of Translating*. By means of these two books Nida announced to the world his new translation theory. The first book was theoretical, with thorough and complex discussions and arguments, directed toward discussion of translation in general with occasional reference to Bible translation; the second was a textbook with exercises, primarily directed toward training the Bible translator.

Nida called his theoretical approach to translating "dynamic equivalence." His initial definitions of the term were as follows:

> In such a translation one is not so concerned with matching the receptor-language message with the source-language message, but with the dynamic relationship…, that the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message.
>
> A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message. (Nida 1964:159)
>
> Stated as a kind of formula, we may say that for the type of message contained in the New Testament, we are concerned with a relationship such as can be expressed in the following equation:



> That is to say, the receptor in the circle culture should be able, within his own culture, to respond to the message as given in his language, in substantially the same manner as the receptor in the triangle culture responded, within the context of his own culture, to the message as communicated to him in his own language. (Nida 1964:149)

In addition to proposing the term "dynamic equivalence" and defining it, *Toward a Science of Translating* more importantly establishes the elements that make up the mechanics of dynamic equivalence, namely, receptor response, functional classes of lexical symbols, "kernel" structures as a means of comparing languages, and the structure of translation as a process of decoding, transferring, and encoding.

1.1. Receptor Response

In the subsequent book entitled *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, co-authored with Charles Taber, the following explanation of dynamic equivalence was offered on the first page of the book:

> The older focus in translating was the form of the message, and translators took particular delight in being able to reproduce stylistic specialties, e.g., rhythms, rhymes, plays on words, chiasmus, parallelism and unusual grammatical structures. The new focus, however, has shifted from the form of the message to the response of the receptor. Therefore what one must determine is the response of the receptor to the translated message. This response must then be compared with the way in which the original receptors presumably reacted to the message when it was given in its original setting. (Nida and Taber 1969:1)

The concept of receptor response became an identifying mark of dynamic equivalence, many times to the neglect of the other elements to be described below. One is tempted at times to believe that people who read about or heard about dynamic equivalence after its introduction either ignored or did not understand the other elements of Nida's theory, and that this apparent fact has influenced the way in which dynamic equivalence was understood and applied.

1.2. Classes of Lexical Symbols

Latin and Greek have cast a grammatical form over most western languages, such that it is usually true that a noun in one language will be a noun in another, and the same with verbs and other parts of speech. However, as the work of Bible translation has ventured outside the reach of these ancient languages and their grammatical molds, a more universal system of classification was needed, though in fact the concept of such a system can be found in writings as early as 1776. John Beekman and John Callow give an elaborate footnote in *Translating the Word of God* about the historical use and varying terminology for these classes of lexical symbols:

> Probably the earliest analysis in terms of such classes is found in George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, first published in 1776. A recent edition (1963) has been edited by Lloyd Bitzer and published by the Southern Illinois University Press. On page 385, Campbell labels the four semantic classes as (1) things, (2) operations, (3) attributes, and (4) connectives.
>
> Gustaf Stern, in his *Meaning and Change of Meaning* (1931, p. 19), says, "Words are signs which name that for which they are signs: *table is* the name of an object, *red* of a quality, *run* of an activity, *over* of a relation."
>
> Wilbur Urban, Susanne K. Langer, and Edward Sapir in 1939, 1942, and 1944 respectively, each proposed a set of labels to represent these basic classes of semantic elements.
>
> More recently, E. A. Nida, in *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964, p. 62) speaks of four principal functional classes of lexical symbols, which he labels as object words, event words, abstracts and relationals. (Beekman and Callow 1974:68)

We will refer to this type of analysis consistently as the TEAR analysis, an acronym based on usage found in Mildred Larson's *Meaning-Based Translation* (1984:26ff) for "things, events, attributes, and relations." Nida states the reason for adoption of the TEAR analysis as follows:

> There are three practical advantages to be derived from treating transformations in terms of four basic semantic elements: (1) we can often more readily see the equivalence of different formal structures

> possessing the same meaningful relationships, (2) we can more easily plot complex structures, without having to employ long series of related transformations from terminals back to kernels, and (3) we can more significantly highlight some of the contrasts between languages which tend to be otherwise obscured. (Nida 1964:65)

1.3. Kernel Structures

Another of the foundational concepts of dynamic equivalence as Nida defined it was the concept of kernel structures. Kernel analysis of language has more to do with clauses and sentences than words. Nida said this about such constructions,

> The kernel constructions in any language are the minimal number of structures from which the rest can be most efficiently and relatively derived. They are quite naturally not identical in all languages, but what seems to be very significant is that in so far as basic structures of different languages have been studied there appear to be many more parallelisms between kernel structures than between the more elaborate transforms. In fact, the remarkable similarities between the basic structures of different languages are increasingly becoming an object of study by linguists. (Nida 1964:66)

The relationship of surface structure to more simple and basic kernel structures, an underlying tenet for transformational grammar, was important for the linguist, but even more important for the translator, since it paved the way for the next element: analysis, transfer, and restructuring.

1.4. Analysis, Transfer, and Restructuring

The steps of analysis, transfer, and restructuring are not new with Nida. He recognized that and built on the work of others, consolidating and adapting concepts already proven and accepted among linguists, and working them into a system to aid translators in their work. What can be recognized as his work is the composite of the whole, connected with a remarkable flair for semantic insights. We can describe the composite as a system of analysis, transfer, and restructuring, or in the wording of *Toward a Science of Translating*, decoding, transfer, and encoding (Nida 1964:146).

> Instead of attempting to set up transfers from one language to another by working out long series of equivalent formal structures which are presumably adequate to "translate" from one language into another, it is both scientifically and practically more efficient (1) to reduce the source text to its structurally simplest and most semantically evident kernels, (2) to transfer the meaning from source language to receptor language on a structurally simple level, and (3) to generate the stylistically and semantically equivalent expression in the receptor language. (Nida 1964:68)

The Theory and Practice of Translation continued to employ the same basic elements of *Toward a Science of Translating*, i.e., classes of lexical symbols and kernel structures; and analysis, transfer, and restructuring. The authors diagram the latter as follows in figure 1:



Figure 1. Dynamic Equivalence model of analysis, transfer, and restructuring.

(Nida and Taber 1969:33)

The terms used in *Toward a Science of Translating* for this process—decoding, transfer, and encoding—clearly represent the fact that Nida viewed translation at this early stage as based on a code model of communication, in which the senders of the message encoded all they wished to say in the message. Thus

in transfer even "implied" kernels were to be transferred, since they were considered a part of the code, and expanding the translation was the way to reproduce all the information of the code.

2. Contemporaneous and Subsequent Theories of Equivalence

The concept of dynamic equivalence has taken hold in the Bible translation profession, and has spawned both developments and reactions. Shortly after Eugene Nida published books that explained his theory of dynamic equivalence, Beekman and Callow published *Translating the Word of God* in 1974, in which they presented materials related to the issue of Bible translation theory and methodology. This was the start of an approach to Bible translation that has been called "meaning-based translation." Nida later revised his initial theoretical writings and published materials concerning an approach he called "functional equivalence." In 1987 James Price published his first presentation of his Bible translation theory called "complete equivalence," later "optimal equivalence." The same year a team that was organized under the leadership of Eugene Bunkowske began producing a Bible translation which would be called *God's Word to the Nations* and be based on a translation theory or procedure called "closest natural equivalent" (*God's Word to the Nations* 2004). This term was not a new one, having been used by Nida before he came up with dynamic equivalence. Mary Snell-Hornby's comment on these developments is entirely appropriate: "With the realization that translation equivalence cannot be viewed in terms of absolute symmetry, attempts were made to rethink the concept, to qualify and classify it, leading to what can only be described as an explosive proliferation of equivalence types" (Snell-Hornby 1988:18–19).

2.1. Meaning-Based Translation

Mildred Larson (1984) and Katharine Barnwell (1986), both students of Beekman, subsequently published materials about translation, in which they used the term meaning-based translation to describe their approach. According to email communication with Larson (November 25, 2003), Barnwell was the first to use the term in print. Perhaps Barnwell originated it herself but Larson felt it could have originated in one of their interactive consultants' conferences with Beekman.

Barnwell's book *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles* (1986) has been translated into French and Spanish. As its secondary title suggests, its approach is very practical and basic; there is limited theory or discussion of underlying principles. However, the simplicity and directness of the book is one of its strengths. The first edition was published in 1975. The "Acknowledgements" of the third edition (1986) has the following: "The translation principles that are taught in this book are drawn from *The Theory and Practice of Translation* by E. A. Nida and C. R. Taber, and from *Translating the Word of God* by J. Beekman and J. C. Callow" (Barnwell 1986:4).

Barnwell begins her chapter entitled "Two Kinds of Translation" with these definitions (Barnwell 1986:13):

> A LITERAL translation is one that follows as closely as possible the *form* of the language which is used in the original message.
>
> A MEANING-BASED translation is one that aims to express the exact *meaning* of the original message in a way that is natural in the new language.

Barnwell opens chapter 6, entitled "Two Steps in Translation," with the diagram shown in figure 2:

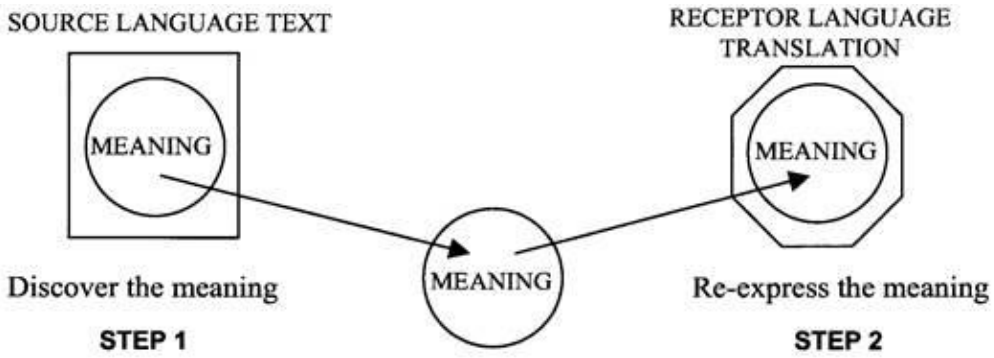


Figure 2. Two steps of translation.

(Barnwell 1986:30)

Mildred Larson prepared a companion volume to Beekman and Callow's *Translating the Word of God* (1974) entitled *A Manual for Problem-Solving in Bible Translation* (1975). In the private communication mentioned above, Larson explained that while working on that manual, Beekman urged her to use the materials to produce a beginning textbook on translation that would be acceptable on the secular university campus. Larson produced her first edition of *Meaning-Based Translation* in 1984. The book does not use biblical examples, but there is a companion volume made up of biblical exercises keyed to the content of the book.

Larson includes a diagram like the one in Barnwell's book, as shown in figure 3:

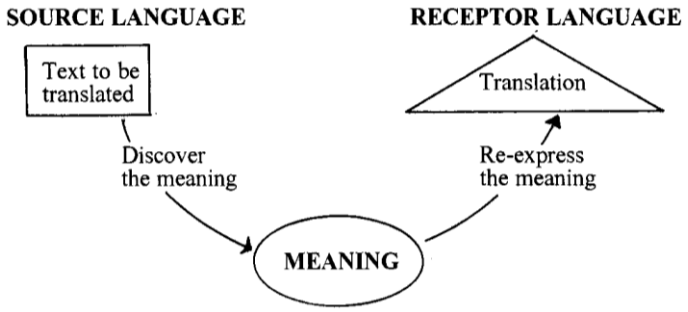


Figure 3. The process of Meaning-Based translation.

(Larson 1984:4)

We can perhaps call this process the "simplified" analysis-transfer-restructuring of Nida. It is virtually identical to Barnwell's. The concept of meaning-based translation as Larson expounds it involves the interplay of three elements, as in the case of dynamic equivalence: functional classes of lexical symbols, "kernel" structures as a means of comparing languages, and the structure of translation as a process of decoding, transferring, and encoding. However, as in the case of Beekman-Callow and Barnwell, the terminology and a few other details are different.

2.2. Functional Equivalence

There is about a fifteen-to-twenty-year gap between the writings of Nida and associates on dynamic equivalence and the writings that proposed a new term, functional equivalence. During this time Nida was of course very active, producing translators' handbooks and various articles on a variety of subjects. Undoubtedly he reflected on and evaluated his theory of dynamic equivalence, as did many others. The concept and term "dynamic equivalence" became quite popular, and developed a life of its own.

Not only in translation but also in other areas, dynamic equivalence soon became associated with any type of transculturation. For example, Charles H. Kraft published an article in a missiology periodical (1979) called "Dynamic Equivalence Churches," in which Kraft defends certain practices on the basis of the "principle" of dynamic equivalence. Author D. A. Carson contends that dynamic equivalence is overused:

> Unfortunately, now that "dynamic equivalence" is so popular, it is not infrequently abused. I hasten to add that the most careful scholars in the field do not err in this way. What is still one of the finest books in the area, *The Theory and Practice of Translation,* by Nida and Taber, abounds in wise and sensitive caveats. For example, the translator is carefully warned against trying to get behind the biblical writer, or ahead of him; and he is cautioned not to confuse linguistic translation with "cultural translation," transforming the Pharisees and Sadducees, for instance, into present-day religious parties. In other words, the historical particularity of the text is to be respected. (Carson 1985:202)

In the preface to the book *From One Language to Another*, de Waard and Nida point out a major difference between this book and earlier books with respect to the terminology used for the theory:

> One conspicuous difference in terminology in this volume in contrast with *Theory and Practice of Translation* and *Toward a Science of Translating* is the use of the expression "functional equivalence" rather than "dynamic equivalence." The substitution of "functional equivalence" is not designed to suggest anything essentially different from what was earlier designated by the phrase "dynamic equivalence." Unfortunately, the expression "dynamic equivalence" has often been misunderstood as referring to anything which might have special impact and appeal for receptors. Some Bible translators have seriously violated the principle of dynamic equivalence as described in *Theory and Practice of Translating* and *Toward a Science of Translating.* It is hoped, therefore, that the use of the expression "functional equivalence" may serve to highlight the communicative functions of translating and to avoid misunderstanding. (de Waard and Nida 1986:vii–viii)

By this point the term "dynamic equivalence" had taken on a life of its own to such an extent that the originator of the term abandoned it. Most of the time when someone—even a scholar or translator—speaks of dynamic equivalence, they do not mean what Nida meant. In fact, the principles and practices that are found in *Toward a Science of Translating* and *The Theory and Practice of Translation* are unlikely to be understood by someone without significant experience in the multiple-language setting of Bible translation or a linguist experienced in translation theory. What seems to have happened is that readers of Nida ignored the specific methodology, applying dynamic equivalence broadly. Any style of translation that is not overtly literal, that has any degree of equivalence, whether paraphrase, summation, cultural adaptation, or even free variation, has been called dynamic equivalence. The term had become so imprecise as to be unusable. Therefore Nida, repudiating those imprecise applications, rejected "dynamic equivalence" in favor of "functional equivalence."

2.3. Optimal Equivalence

Optimal equivalence has its origins with James D. Price. It is the translation theory applied in two English language Bible versions: the *New King James Version* and the *Holman Christian Standard Bible.* Price has published two works on the subject: *Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation* (1987), and *A Theory for Bible Translation: An Optimal Equivalence Model* (2007).

The theory of optimal equivalence is built on many of the same principles as dynamic equivalence. But optimal equivalence seeks to apply those principles in a less subjective way. Both are built on the linguistic theories of transformational grammar. Price represents the stages of analysis, transfer, and restructuring as belonging to structural linguistics and then as being adapted to dynamic equivalence. In a section entitled "From Structural Linguistics to Dynamic Equivalence" (Price 1987:18–19), he first establishes the terminology of structural linguistics in regard to surface structure, kernels, transformations and back-transformations. In figure 4 Price graphically describes optimal equivalence translation from a structural linguistics point of view.

A second observation about optimal equivalence is that, like meaning-based translation, it is clearly based on the core principles of dynamic equivalence. It varies more from its origin than does meaning-based translation, but it is clearly linked. It shares with dynamic equivalence a deep theoretical base in modern linguistic research, though it does not share the same semantic focus and analysis that is found in both dynamic equivalence and meaning-based translation.

A third observation about optimal equivalence is that it is a scientific theory similar to dynamic equivalence, but one that essentially produces a modified literal translation. Examples of this are the *New*

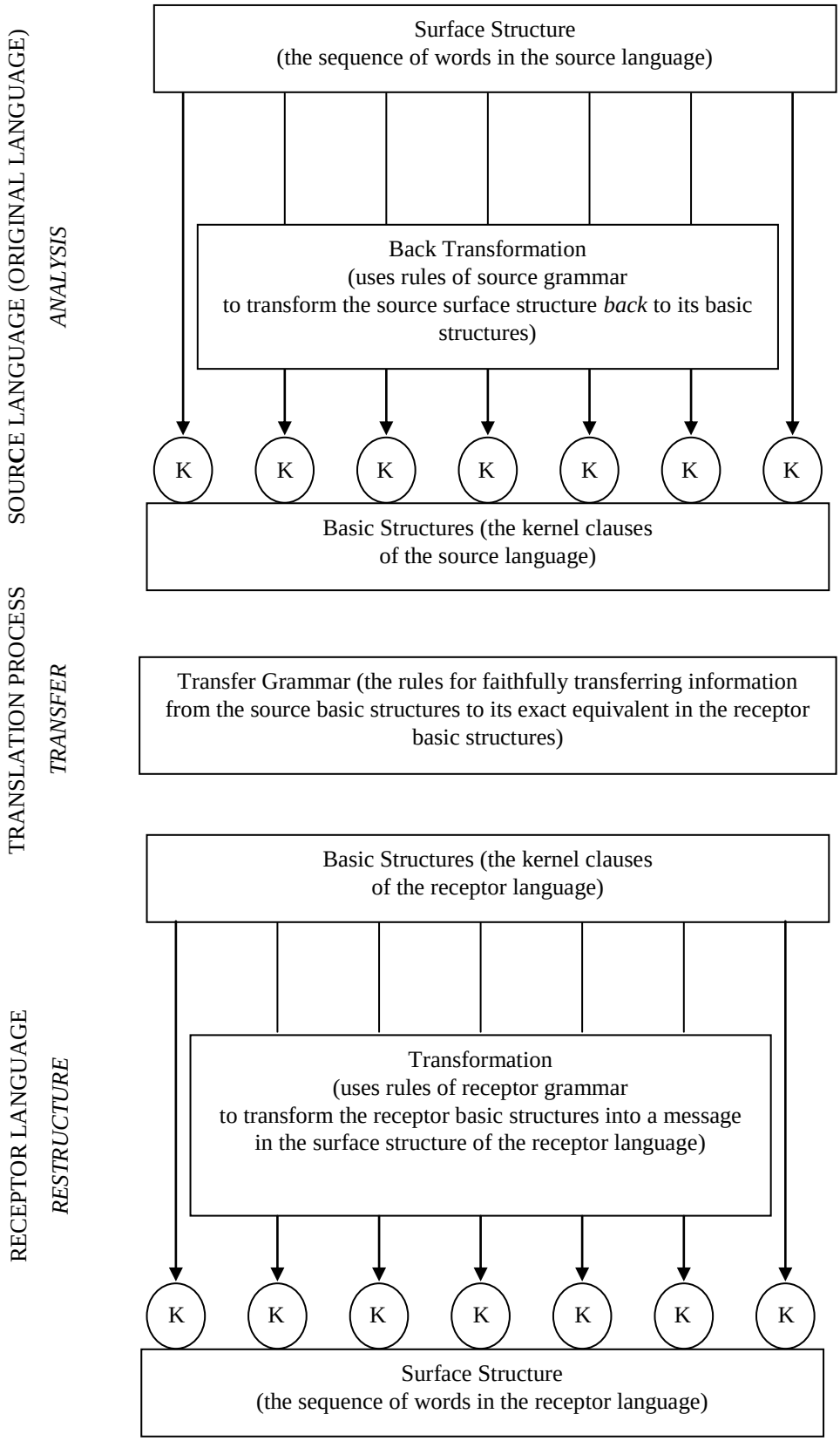


Figure 4. Optimal Equivalence description of the translation process.

(Price 1987:20-21)

King James Version and the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*. One of Price's main contentions in his writings is that the ideas of analysis, transfer, and restructuring do not necessarily result in an explanatory or expanded translation. The resulting translation depends more on the presuppositions and commitments of the translator than it does on what methodology or theory that translator follows.

2.4. Comparison of Equivalence Theories

The various equivalence theories share common elements and a common origin to some extent, having arisen in the same linguistic milieu. Figure 5 graphically illustrates these relationships:

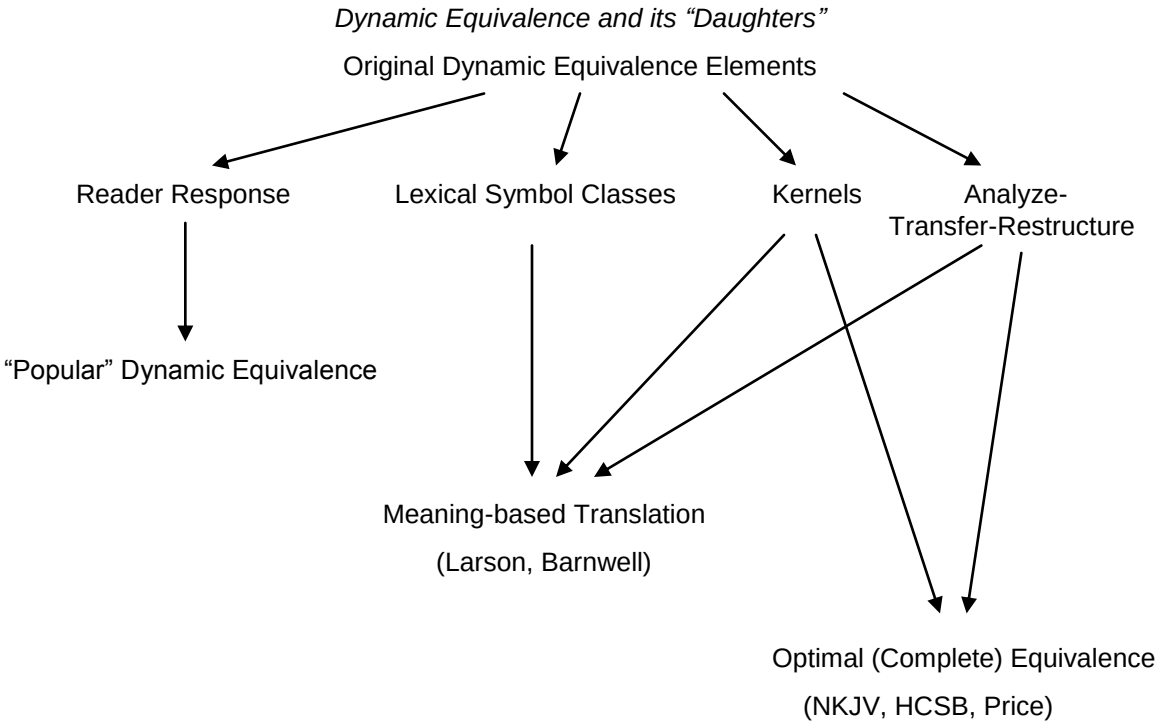


Figure 5. Relationship of Dynamic Equivalence theories and key elements.

Table 1 compares specific treatments and explanations of key elements of the equivalence theories that have been described:

Table 1. Comparison of key components of equivalence translation theories

theory	deep structure analysis	translation process	classes of lexical symbols	target audience	reader response
Dynamic Equivalence	kernels	analysis-transfer-restructuring	object words, event words, abstracts, relationals	non-Christian	adequacy of the translation must be judged in terms of the way people respond to it
Functional Equivalence	kernels	analysis-transfer-restructuring	object words, event words, abstracts, relationals	Christian	sociosemiotic approach to meaning – understanding impact on original hearers
Meaning-Based Translation					
• Beekman-Callow	propositions	discover, transfer meaning	Thing, Event, Abstraction, Relation	"someone who has had little or no contact with Christianity"	dynamic fidelity does not require an answer to all the questions which might be raised about a topic under discussion
• Barnwell	propositions	discover, transfer meaning	events, attributes (only terms mentioned in *Bible Translation*)	"as intelligible as possible to non-Christians, while recog-nizing that certain parts of Scripture are addressed specifically to Christians"	hearers from the receptor language culture will be able to understand correctly the meaning that the original author intended to communicate
• Larson	propositions	discover, transfer meaning	things, events, attributes, relations	any average speaker of the language	"How can you really measure response?"
Optimal Equivalence	kernels	analysis-transfer-restructuring	nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions	the audience selected by the project guidelines	not a necessary ingredient of a translation theory—if translation is accurate, response is purely the outcome of free will

3. Other Approaches in Bible Translation

The latter part of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first saw a shift in Bible translation accepted theory. The code model, the communication theory that had been the basis for the work of Nida

and those who followed him, was becoming replaced by the ostensive-inferential model of communication. This was due primarily to the writings of Ernst-August Gutt, following developments in linguistic theory spearheaded by Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson. Relevance theory has become the touchstone for discussion of Bible translation for the beginning decade of the twenty-first century. It has been the first point of discussion to break the near stranglehold that discussions of equivalence have had on the subject of Bible translation. A second new approach to Bible translation was first explained in *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference,* a collection of writings edited by Timothy Wilt in 2003. Frames of reference theory was explained in Wilt's article entitled "Translation and Communication." In the same volume, Ernst Wendland wrote an article entitled "A Literary Approach to Biblical Text Analysis and Translation." In 2008 Wendland also published a book entitled *Contextual Frames of Reference in Translation.* Relevance theory and frames of reference theory are discussed more fully below.

3.1. Relevance Theory

In 1986 Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson published *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, a book about the psychology of oral communication. The concept of relevance theory was introduced into the Bible translation arena by Ernst-August Gutt, who studied under Deirdre Wilson at the University of London. At a United Bible Society workshop in Zimbabwe in 1991 Gutt presented a series of lectures published in 1992 as *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation.* His purpose in those lectures was to show how relevance theory relates to Bible translation.

The essence of relevance theory, according to Gutt, is that the process of communication involves two elements: a communicative intent, and an informative intent. In other words, a person intends to communicate to another, and does so by inferring certain things the communicator believes the hearer will understand from what has been said. The utterance may or may not contain all the information necessary for the hearer to understand the intent, but the speaker assumes certain things of the hearer that enables the hearer to understand what the speaker has said with a minimum of words. The inference model of communication differs from the encoding-decoding model of Nida's dynamic equivalence in that all the information necessary to process the communication is not encoded in the utterances. Rather, the utterances tap the existing knowledge the two communicators share so that communication occurs with a minimum of effort. Communication involves coding and decoding, but there is more communicated than is in the code (Gutt 1992:10–14).

> This failure to recognize the inferential nature of communication has had far-reaching consequences in translation. For one thing, it has led to the belief that the main problem in translation is finding the right target-language expression for the meaning intended in the source language; it is assumed that correct encoding will ensure correct understanding. However, just as identity in encoded meaning of two expressions of the *same* language does not guarantee identity of the message conveyed by them, neither does identity in encoded meaning of two expressions of *different* languages guarantee identity of the message conveyed. Even a correctly encoded message can be seriously misunderstood. (Gutt 1992:18, emphasis in original)

Relevance theory says that the usual reason a translation is misunderstood is not because of inadequate equivalence, but because of inadequate background on which to base the inferences required to understand the text. "Translation theories that automatically assume that the cause of miscommunication is mistranslation not only run into serious difficulties, but are also a source of considerable frustration to translators" (Gutt 1992:19). The hearer of an utterance hears it within a context, which in relevance theory is "a *psychological notion:* it refers to a subset of the hearer's belief about the world—more precisely it refers to a part of the *cognitive environment* of the hearer" (Gutt 1992:21–22). The speaker shares the context with the hearer, and so seeks to produce a *contextual effect*, that is, an understanding that is a product of both the context and the utterance.

> Against this background, it comes as no surprise at all that receptors are often not very interested in biblical texts, a problem that is being recognized more and more clearly, sometimes referred to as that of "scripture use." If relevance theory is right at all, one of the critical conditions on which successful communication depends is that there must be adequate contextual effects. If the context which the receptors bring to the translated text is so different that there are few or even no contextual effects,

> not only will they have no assurance that they have understood the text, but they are also very likely to *terminate the communication process*. That is, they will stop reading or listening. (Gutt 1992:30, emphasis in original)

Much more could be said about relevance theory, but some of Gutt's conclusions that relate to Bible translation are particularly important.

> Thus, we have, in fact, arrived at a possible absolute definition of translation, which we might call *direct translation* because of its relation to direct quotation: *A receptor-language utterance is a direct translation of a source-language utterance if, and only if, it presumes to interpretively resemble the original completely (in the context envisaged for the original)*. There are two reasons why this definition says "*presumes* to interpretively resemble": (1) It seems crucial for translation that the receptor-language text be, in fact, presented as the representation of an original; otherwise there is danger of miscommunication. (2) There is a presumption, not a guarantee, of success.
>
> Notice that this notion of translation is indeed independent of the receptor-language context—it is defined with regard to the original context, no matter who the target audience might be. In terms of relevance theory, this notion of translation would be defined as the extreme of interpretive use, presuming total interpretive resemblance. (Gutt, 1992:66, emphasis in original)

The concept that the receptor-language context is independent of what the translation should be reinforces one conclusion. The reception of any translation varies greatly, and every group or individual receptor brings a different cognitive environment or context to the reading of Scripture. These variables lead us to say that relevance theory pertains more to the use of the translation than the making of the translation. Translation is only the basis for communication; communication must take place in real time between real people. Relevance theory is a better model for communication of the translated message after it has been carefully translated to convey as much as possible of the original contextual situation. This explains also one of Gutt's key statements concerning successful communication in translation: "It must be clearly recognized that the final objectives of Scripture translation cannot be realized by translation alone" (Gutt 1992:68).

3.2. Frames of Reference

In his "Translation and Communication" article mentioned above, Wilt lists the frames of reference for his approach as cognitive, textual, situational, organizational, and sociocultural (Wilt 2003:45). Wendland gives them in a slightly different order as cognitive, sociocultural, organizational, situational, and textual, and adds lexical frames, arranging them in a "cline of referential *generality*" from most general on the cognitive end to least general on the lexical end (Wendland 2008:6). He uses the image of an onion to convey the relationships of these frames, with multiple layers surrounding the core, each layer representing one of the contexts or frames of the text in question.

The outermost layer, the cognitive frame of reference, is "more commonly termed 'world/life-view' or 'mental model.' It is a pervasive outlook on reality that is normally very broad in its range or scope, embracing the composite cognitive environment of an entire society or community" (Wendland 2008:19). The next frame has to do with the semantic domains and "specific vernacular lexical items" of the indigenous culture that is the target of the translation (Wendland 2008:51), among other things. How a society divides up the semantic domains of their world has a great deal to do with the understanding of words in context, and the selection of words for translation. Organizational frames refer to the societal sub-groups such as the Christian church in a given area and people group, and the context that such sub-cultures impose upon the context. Wendland describes the situational framework by means of the acronym SPEAKING: setting, participants, ends, activity, key (atmosphere), instrumentality, norms, and genre (Wendland 2008:92–93). Concerning textual frames, Wendland says, "a given text is either partially or wholly derived from, based on, related to, or in some other way conditioned by other texts with respect to general ideas, presuppositions, structural arrangements, particular concepts, key terms, or memorable phrases. These are all aspects of **intertextual** influence" (Wendland 2008:110). Against these various interrelated layers of the "onion" the individual lexical items of the text are viewed or understood by the receptor.

Frames of reference bear some clear similarities to polysystem theory as developed by Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s. Even-Zohar uses the term "framework" for his polysystems, calling them also a "repertoire": "What does a culture repertoire consist of? If we view culture as a framework, a sphere, which makes it possible to organize social life, then the repertoire *in* culture, or *of* culture, is where the necessary items for that framework are stored" (Even-Zohar 1997:20).

4. Major Publications in Bible Translation Theory and Practice

Following are some of the major publications in Bible translation theory and practice:

- Nida, Eugene – *Bible Translating* (1947, 1961)
- Nida, Eugene – *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964)
- Nida, Eugene and Charles Taber – *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969)
- Beekman, John and John Callow – *Translating the Word of God* (1974)
- Barnwell, Katharine – *Introduction to Semantics and Translation: With Special Reference to Bible Translation* (1980)
- Nida, Eugene and William Reyburn – *Meaning Across Cultures* (1981)
- Barnwell, Katharine – *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles* (1986)
- de Waard, Jan and Eugene Nida – *From One Language to Another* (1986)
- Price, James D. – *Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation* (1987)
- Gutt, Ernst-August – *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (2000)
- Wilt, Timothy (ed.) – *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* (2003)
- Price, James D. – *A Theory for Bible Translation: An Optimal Equivalence Model* (2007)
- Wendland, Ernst – *Contextual Frames of Reference in Translation: A Coursebook for Bible Translators and Teachers* (2008)

5. Linguistics and Scientific Translation

Having looked at the historic sweep of Bible translation theories, we will drop back in history again to follow a different branch. In 1964 Nida published *Toward a Science of Translating* and the next year J. C. Catford published *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965). In 1968 Otto Kade of the German Leipzig School published *Zufall und Gesetzmassigkeit in der Übersetzung.* Further publications of others in the same field all centered on or included two major concepts: deep vs. surface structure transfers and some form of equivalence theory.

It is clear from the writings of Nida and others that their goal was to make a science of translation, as was clear from similar developments that spawned the term *Übersetzungswissenschaft* associated with Wolfram Wilss and the Leipzig School of translation (Snell-Hornby 1988:14). In the first pages of *Toward a Science of Translating* Nida asks,

> Is translating, for example, an art or a science? Is it a skill which can only be acquired by practice, or are there certain procedures which can be described and studied? The truth is that practice in translating has far outdistanced theory; and though no one will deny the artistic elements in good translating, linguists and philologists are becoming increasingly aware that the processes of translation are amenable to rigorous description. When we speak of "the science of translating," we are of course concerned with the descriptive aspect; for just as linguistics may be classified as a descriptive science, so the transference of a message from one language to another is likewise a valid subject for scientific description. Those who have insisted that translation is an art, and nothing more, have often failed to probe beneath the surface of the obvious principles and procedures that govern its functioning. (Nida 1964:3)

It is interesting that Nida here characterized linguistic science as descriptive, yet the very approach he seemed to take, and definitely the approach of those who followed him in the equivalence train, can best be described as prescriptive. In addition, one gets the sense that much of the writing on dynamic equivalence was a sort of polemic against formal equivalence, which was viewed as the regnant approach to Bible translation in need of dislodging.

6. The Rise of Translation Studies as a Discipline

At about the same time as the rise of "scientific" translation, somewhere else, "in a galaxy far, far away," another development was arising in the field of translation, in the area of literary studies. Despite the fact that linguists pride themselves in examining empirical data and developing careful descriptive analyses of language, the equivalence schools were very prescriptive in their approach and application, as already noted above.

In 1963, Jiří Levý published *Literary Translation*, a work representing the Czech Formalist School of translation studies. Edwin Gentzler argues that Levý and others were the successors to the Russian Formalist School, which laid the foundation for early translation studies (Gentzler 1993:77–79). The Czech School in turn influenced the early Low Country scholars who have come to make up the principals in the area of Descriptive Translation Studies, James Holmes in particular (Gentzler 1993:78). Holmes is credited with inventing the classification of the new discipline as "translation studies" when in 1972 he published "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies," and also as the one who provided the discipline's framework (Naudé 2002:45). Figure 7 graphs Holmes' basic "map" of translation studies.

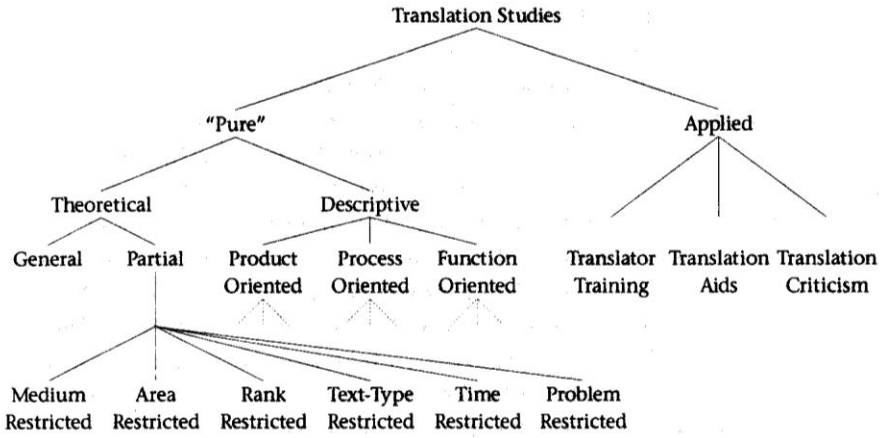


Figure 6. Holmes' "map" of translation studies.

(Toury 1995:10)

As a result of a publication in 1985 by Theo Hermans entitled *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, this school has been dubbed the Manipulation School (Snell-Hornby 1988:22).

In yet another development in the area of translation studies, Katarina Reiß, whom Snell-Hornby classifies as part of the scientific equivalence school (Snell-Hornby 1988:14), was joined by Hans Vermeer in 1984 and published *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, signaling the rise of functional translation and *skopostheorie* to define cultural rather than linguistic transfer of equivalence. Whereas this does represent a continued use of the term equivalence, many of the German scholars reject the term while embracing the concept of *skopostheorie*:

> In this study the view is also taken that equivalence is unsuitable as a basic concept in translation theory: the term *equivalence*, apart from being imprecise and ill-defined (even after a heated debate of over twenty years) presents an illusion of symmetry between languages which hardly exists beyond the level of vague approximations and which distorts the basic problems of translation. (Snell-Hornby 1988:22)

In 1991 Christiane Nord published *Textanalyse und Übersetzen* as a further example of development within the functionalist translation school. In regard to this school, Jacobus Naudé says the following: "According to the functionalist approach a translation is viewed adequate if the translated text is appropriate for the communicative purpose defined in the translation brief, e.g. accessibility of the translated text" (Naudé 2002:52).

The following chart summarizes the historical development of different schools of translation studies:

Table 2. Development of three schools of thought in the 20th century on translation studies

Scientific Translation	Descriptive Translation	Functional Translation
1957 – Noam Chomsky publishes *Syntactic Structures*		
1964 – Nida publishes *Toward a Science of Translating*	1963 – Jiří Levý publishes *Literary Translation* (Czech Formalist School, precursor to Descriptive Translation Studies)	
1965 – John C. Catford publishes his translation theory. Defines translation: The replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language.		
1968 – Otto Kade, of the German Leipzig School, publishes *Zufall und Gesetzmassigkeit in der Übersetzung*	1972 – James Holmes publishes "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies", coins term "Translation Studies" (Low Country School)	
1977 – Wolfram Wilss publishes *Übersetzungswissenschaft: Probleme und Methoden.* (all approaches oriented toward deep structure transfer)	1978 – André Lefevere publishes "Translation: The Focus of the Growth of Literary Knowledge"	
	1985 – Theo Hermans publishes *The Manipulation of Literature* (start of "Manipulation School" of Translation Studies)	1984 – Reiß and Vermeer publish *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, signaling the rise of *Skopostheorie*
		1991 – Christiane Nord publishes *Textanalyse und Übersetzen*.

7. Descriptive Translation Studies and Bible Translation

For the Bible translator, it is not clear whether these three schools of thought present a trilemma or an opportunity. While Bible translators are investigating relevance theory, it is not clear what relevance it actually has to Bible translation over against the theories of the past. But it is quite clear that the notions of equivalence are very much in doubt. The general translation schools have laid aside equivalence for the most part, deeming it an unneeded and unworkable concept for most translation work. The *skopostheorie* framework and functionalist translation provides a much more adaptive framework for translation, and it emphasizes a matter very important in the general translation field—the client-translator relationship. But it provides little if any guidelines for Bible translators—those who have been following mostly prescriptive approaches and now find them out of vogue. The descriptive approach, on the third side of the trilemma, almost seems to be saying, "Let's forget all these approaches for a while, and let's just study and describe translations."

However, the descriptive translation studies approach (DTS) offers a lot of promise to the Bible translator. It represents an approach that puts practice before theory. For example, composers of music usually do not learn to compose music by studying music theory; they learn by studying music. Further, music theory is not the study of how music should be written, but the study of how it is written.

Bible translation theories and writings have been too microscopic in their approach. While the equivalence writings have dealt with Bible translations and studied them, for the most part their studies are of words, verses, and small units, rarely looking at more holistic aspects of translation. In fact, the very concept of equivalence leads to such an approach. However, the pairing of DTS with corpus-based translation studies (CTS), aided by increasing availability of electronic texts and sophisticated analysis software to enable more holistic and objective queries of a body of literature, holds promise of discovery and isolation of translation "universals."

> Some of the common themes and commitments between translation studies and corpus-based translation research are, for example, the growing commitment to integrate linguistic approaches and cultural-studies approaches to translation, an awareness of the role of ideology as it affects text, context, translation and the theory, practice and pedagogy of translation, adapting modern technologies to the discipline's needs and purposes. Not only are we now able to study and capture recurrent features ("universals") of translation on a large scale (the norm), and consequently understand translation as a phenomenon in its own right, but we are also able to study creative and individual examples (the exception). (Kruger 2002:79)

DTS suggests that what we are looking for in translation studies is not scientific principles or a scientific method, but rather, as Kruger has suggested above, "norms" of translation. Gideon Toury has explored extensively the idea of translational norms (Toury 1995:56–62), explaining,

> Translation activities should rather be regarded as having cultural significance. Consequently, "translatorship" amounts first and foremost to being able *to play a social role*, i.e., to fulfill a function allotted by a community—to the activity, its practitioners and/or their products—in a way which is deemed appropriate in its own terms of reference. The acquisition of a set of norms for determining the suitability of that kind of behaviour, and for manoeuvring between all the factors which may constrain it, is therefore a prerequisite for becoming a translator within a cultural environment. (Toury 1995:53)

In her book *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*, Mary Snell-Hornby makes the following observations:

1. Translation studies should not be considered a mere offshoot of another discipline or sub-discipline (whether Applied Linguistics or Comparative Literature): both the translator and the translation theorist are rather concerned with a world between disciplines, languages and cultures.

2. Whereas linguistics has gradually widened its field of interest from the micro- to the macro-level, translation studies, which is concerned essentially with texts against their situational and cultural background, should adopt the reverse perspective: as maintained by the gestalt psychologists, an analysis of parts cannot provide an understanding of the whole, which must be analyzed from "the top down."

3. Translation studies has been hampered by classical modes of categorization, which operate with rigid dividing-lines, binary opposites, antitheses and dichotomies. Frequently these are mere academic constructs which paralyze the finer differentiation required in all aspects of translation studies. In our approach the typology is replaced by the prototypology, admitting blends and blurred edges, and the dichotomy gives way to the concept of a spectrum or cline against which phenomena are situated and focussed.
4. While the classic approach to the study of language and translation has been to isolate phenomena (mainly words) and study them in depth, translation studies is essentially concerned with a web of relationships, the importance of individual items being decided by their relevance in the larger context of text, situation and culture. (Snell-Hornby 1988:35)

8. Observations and Conclusions about Bible Translation and Theory

A goal of this study has been to place the Bible translation theories of the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries into their historical context. It is probably apparent at this point why a single or even general theory of translation has still escaped us. Of that subject, Mary Snell-Hornby has suggested, "This phenomenon, whereby a theorist makes global observations on translation in general, but actually means only one, often narrow area of it, still characterizes translation studies today—to the detriment of a general theory of translation" (Snell-Hornby 1988:14).

Whether we reach a single general theory of translation in the near future is unclear, and in fact may not be desirable, as the dominance of dynamic equivalence in the past may indicate. The idea of "picking one theory and hanging on for dear life" seems to be an approach that should be avoided, as well as the approach to ignore all theoretical and systematic approaches and "just be an artist." More practical for translators everywhere is probably a more eclectic approach, or at least a more sensitive approach to the dangers of adopting one theory, approach, or outlook. So the next section will be a sampling of observations and conclusions.

8.1. Equivalence Theories

It is rather disconcerting to note that while the Bible translation community has been debating and struggling over equivalence theories, the general translation community has essentially rejected equivalence as not possible. Furthermore, as already noted, the dynamic/functional equivalent approach, originally designed to be descriptive of translation, has become prescriptive for translation. However, the difference between translating a sacred text and translating literature, advertising materials, newspaper articles, and all of the wide range of general translation materials reflects a point that cannot be totally ignored. It is not so much that Bible translators are obsessed with equivalence theories and need to "grow up," so to speak; their work suggests that one of the "norms" of Bible translation is the very concept of equivalence.

Unlike broad translation studies, biblical translation has an obligation to the original text that other types of translation not only do not share, but which is actually an obstacle to them oftentimes. A need for equivalence in an advertising brochure can easily be seen to be a definite hindrance, but the Bible translator has a different commitment and responsibility, that in a significant way must include some measure of equivalence. However, equivalence cannot continue to be understood only in terms of one definition of it. It should rather be seen as a palette of colors or techniques, a "cline" of possibilities:

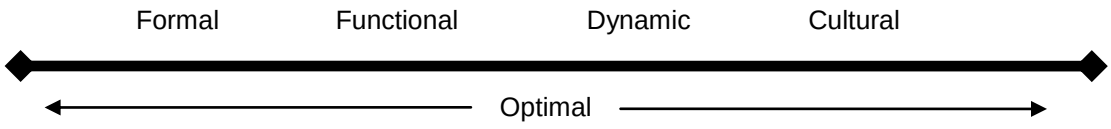


Figure 7. Equivalence as a Bible translation norm, a palette or "cline."

In looking at equivalence as a biblical translation norm, we must nevertheless avoid the trap of being too microscopic in our look at translation, looking primarily at words and phrases, as the equivalence approach has been in the past. A more holistic approach is in order, and several factors are working toward that end,

such as the emphasis in discourse analysis to better understand the entirety of a text, the concept of frames of reference as the wrapping and conditioning of any and all texts, and the greater emphasis on the translator as a bridge between two cultures.

In the grand scheme of things, it may be better to look at the work of Nida, Beekman, and those who have followed them as not so much establishing a theory of translation as establishing a school of pedagogy. Equivalence is very useful as a pedagogical approach, and in the process of its use thousands of mother-tongue translators have been elevated from the tendency to follow what is traditionally taught about translation to a more natural and understandable result of their translation efforts.

8.2. The Cultural Turn

It is not surprising that some of the last writings of Nida on translation theory would be called *Meaning Across Cultures*, and that *From One Language to Another* would include so much emphasis on the sociosemiotic approach to translation. Nearly all theories and writings over the last 20 plus years have swung much more to social and cultural issues related to translation. This has marked a major sea change in translation thinking, what is known as "the cultural turn" in translation studies, viewing translation as an act of cultural communication rather than of scientific transfer. It is no longer thought that translators should just be bilingual, but that they should be also bicultural as much as possible.

The cultural turn, along with the post-colonial realization and perception that has affected Bible translation, has brought into sharp focus the fact that Bible translation in reality involves three cultures, the ancient biblical culture, the modern target culture, and the mediating Western culture of those who advise and guide the mother-tongue translators. In each of these areas more attention is needed. A major goal of training approaches should not just be to train the translator in suitable techniques, but also to help the translator to understand the ancient culture of the biblical world. The more vividly the translator understands that world and culture, the more capable she or he will become in being the cultural bridge for his or her own people, and the less dependent on the insights and perceptions of a post-modern western mindset and world view. The mediation of the translation process by western personnel is a potential danger to the cultural transfer, and must be recognized as such.

The issue of the target culture for Bible translation is a critical question with many facets. The old emphasis on targeting non-Christians with translation needs to be revisited and thought through anew. To target a culture that will never be inclined to use the bulk of the Bible translated, at the same time failing to target the yet-to-exist subculture of the Christian community within that culture is to create a translation that will likely fall short of meeting the needs of that subculture. The culture that exists must be targeted with material that is biblically based but not translation predominantly in the traditional sense of the term, and extensive Bible translation might be deferred or kept in draft or limited publication until such a time that the subculture that needs and will use the Bible translation is able to one extent or another, with one degree of help or another, do the translation itself. Until the culture to be communicated to exists, Bible translation may have to be directed in a limited sense toward a culture that is not ultimately the target of Bible translation, but out of which the Bible translation target culture will be born.

8.3. Scientific vs. Descriptive vs. Functional Translation

So is translation art or science? It is good to remember that a scientific method is a repeatable procedure with the same results each time, and is more of a description of machine translation than of human translation. Furthermore, we still know very little if anything about the actual mental process of translation, certainly not enough to describe it scientifically. So translation is therefore art and not science, though it does involve scientific use of the materials of its craft, as any good art would. With the continuing advances in computers and technology, it may yet be possible to achieve some kind of machine translation that actually works consistently, but such a prospect is as appealing to most translators as is the prospect of having machines compose music.

As an alternative to a scientific approach to translation, descriptive translation studies offer the hope that something more attainable and immediately useful is near at hand, the understanding of translation "norms" and how they function in a given society or culture. Descriptive translation studies of Bible translations are

very new, and the results or the long-term benefits are not at all in yet. However, the actual study of translations past and present on a more detailed basis, using the capabilities of the computer and corpus-based research to better understand translations and translating would certainly be a welcome change from the over-abundance of theorizing of the last fifty years and its resultant polarizing and dichotomies.

The functionalist approach to translation and *skopostheorie* also fall into the "pretty-new-and-results-not-in-yet" category. However, the "translation brief," one of the core concepts in *skopostheorie*, has the earmarks of being an intelligent way of laying out the goals and functions of the translation project, with appropriate emphasis on the needs of the target community. The translation community seems to have struggled between thinking that receptor response is everything and thinking it is nothing—the truth probably being somewhere in between. Receptor response is at the core of *skopostheorie*, which tends to have a "market" aspect tied into it, since in general translation so much depends on the client's wishes and intentions. However, such a relationship does not have to have a negative commercial outlook attached to it. Such a relationship is also one of commitment and service. Christiane Nord says,

> According to this view, the translator is committed bilaterally to the source text as well as the target-text situation, and is responsible to both the ST [source text] sender (or the initiator if s/he is also the sender) and the TT [target text] receiver. This responsibility is what I call "loyalty." Loyalty is a moral principle indispensible in the relationships between human beings, who are partners in a communication process, whereas fidelity is a rather technical relationship between two texts. (Nord 2005:32–33)

The switch from textual fidelity to loyalty to the sender and receiver of the text should not be a hard concept for a Bible translator to grasp. It touches at the core of why most of us do Bible translation to begin with. Bible translators, while trying to be sound in principle and practice, also have a commitment to loyalty to the human and divine authors of the Bible as well as the intended recipients of the Bible translations. May God grant us the grace and wisdom to shoulder such a responsibility.

> For the worde of God is liuely, and mightie in operation, and sharper then any two edged sword, and entreth through, euen vnto the diuiding asunder of the soule and the spirit, and of the ioints, and the marow, and is a discerner of the thoughtes, and the intents of the heart.
>
> **Hebrews 4:13 (Geneva Bible)**

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