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Lexical Pragmatics and Hermeneutical Issues in the Translation of Key Terms

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Abstract

Translation involves, among other things, the attempt to communicate the words of one language in another language. An important part of Bible translation is dealing with the translation of key biblical terms. But is it words that we are really translating, or rather the concepts that are associated with those words? Is it reasonable to expect that in translation we will find a word in one language that will communicate "the same meaning" as another word in another language, or borrow a word if necessary? What is the relationship between words and meanings? How are different senses or different meanings bundled together in a single word? Should we be talking in terms of key biblical concepts, rather than key biblical terms, as the goal of what we aim to communicate in translation? This paper draws on insights from the field of lexical pragmatics in order to discuss realities and strategies in translating, based on the principles of representation, underdeterminacy, dynamic context, and the principle of relevance.[1]

1. Introduction

Many Bible translators would identify key terms as one of their biggest challenges. Key terms are often seen as a special set of biblical words with such rich and complex meanings that even the best terms in the vernacular will only allow a small part of those meanings to come through in the translation. During recent discussions of key terms with other translation teams, I have become aware that this is not just a simple *translation* matter, but rather is one that involves critical interpretive issues related to perceptions of the role and function of words and concepts. This article explores the potential impact of lexical pragmatics and how this field of study can shed light on some of the hermeneutical issues involved in the selection of key terms for translation.

2. A Common Key Term Conundrum

This initial section will state the basic problem, using an example from Mapudungun, the language spoken by the Mapuche people of southern Chile and Argentina. When I worked with a team of Mapuche translators, there were several challenges related to finding appropriate key terms. The Greek term προφήτης 'prophet' is a good, relatively straightforward example to consider. For our purposes here, we will say there are two basic uses of prophet in the New Testament:

- Old Testament prophets in the passages that refer to what they said or wrote
- New Testament prophets who prophesied in the early church

Many translation teams deal with the first use of the term prophet before they come to the second use because the Gospels tend to be translated before Acts and the Epistles. At first glance, finding an adequate term for Old Testament prophets is very similar to finding the best way to translate anything. In very simplistic terms, the translator arrives at an understanding of the source text, then he or she looks for the

[1] This article is a revised version of a paper presented at a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Auckland, New Zealand, in August, 2008.

best way to express that meaning in the receptor language. The same should be true with prophet; study the activities and functions of Old Testament prophets, then find the best way in the vernacular to express that meaning. Then the New Testament prophet needs to be studied to evaluate the appropriateness of the term for both Old and New Testament occurrences.

Assuming that we understand the term prophet, we will now consider some pertinent aspects of traditional Mapuche society. The local political leader had messengers, known as *werken*, who were sent to speak on behalf of the leader. Even though social and political factors have changed, the term *werken* is still widely used to refer to a person who communicates a message on behalf of another person.

In early stages of the translation project *werken* seemed to be an adequate term, but the Spanish loan *pürofeta* 'prophet' was later chosen for the final version. There are three critical questions here: 1) Why was *werken* no longer deemed adequate? 2) Why did *pürofeta* seem better? Finally, 3) How does a translator decide what makes a good match for key terms?

As an exegete seeks answers to questions like these, he or she typically consults commentaries and exegetical studies. It is important, then, to look at what the translator will usually find in these reference works. There is a long tradition of word studies in the biblical studies literature, so it is important to see how this current flows into the translator's decision-making process regarding key terms.

3. Words and Concepts in Biblical Studies

One topic of discussion in biblical studies deals with how the meaning of words is determined, which is a crucial question for biblical interpretation as well as for translation. One of the tension points in this discussion has been the relationship of words and concepts. Since 1961, Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* has impacted how biblical scholars think about words and concepts as well as the role context plays in determining the meaning of words. Etymology is another aspect of determining word meanings that has been impacted by Barr's work. Etymology is a valid study in itself, but Barr argued convincingly for a more synchronic approach that has placed strict limits on the role a word's history is allowed to play in determining its meaning in the biblical text.

Barr's ideas have fed into other publications such as Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies* (1984) in the form of the "illegitimate totality transfer." Many students have learned that in biblical studies it is inappropriate to deal with a word as though the entire range of meanings is at work when that word is used in any particular context. There are restrictions on how much meaning or how many meanings of a word are allowable in a single context. Sensitization to this issue is very helpful as a general principle, but actually provides very little guidance for specific cases.

In my opinion, Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies* is a great book to show what should not be done with words, but I want to know what can legitimately be done with them! One of the effects of illegitimate *totality* transfer has been to make any kind of semantic transfer illegitimate. This raises the critical question: how *do* words function and where does their meaning come from?

In *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Barr discusses "the difficult problem of the relation of word and concept" (Barr 1961:207). Based on Barr's ideas, works like the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) have been criticized for the way they confuse words and concepts. As Silva states, "If the purpose of the book is to investigate the theological thought of the New Testament, why do it in a book organized under words?" (Silva 1995:19). Words are apparently okay, but not when they are used to refer to concepts. But what is the difference between a word and a concept? And, I might ask, if TDNT had not been organized under words, what other option would have been available?

The phobia associated with concepts appears to be connected to a move away from the influence of Schleiermacher (1977[1813]) and the belief that the thought world of the biblical writers was truly accessible—in some psychological way—to the interpreter. There are several issues in play here which are beyond the scope of this article, but modern biblical interpretation has moved away from claiming that the interpreter has any access to the thought world behind the text, to a much more "flat-text" position that says the text is all we have. A mediating position seems reasonable here—recognizing that the text is indeed all

we have, but the words in that text connect in some way to the thought processes—or cognitive context—of the originators of that text.

Reference to the cognitive context of the originators of a text is not a claim for the existence of the thought world of the ancient Hebrew- or Greek-speaking authors as formulated by biblical interpreters in the past. The misuse of this notion has led to improper caricatures of these ancient cultures and what was possible or impossible for them to think or say, based on the limitations of their respective languages. To speak of the cognitive context of a particular speech community is to merely acknowledge that any linguistic expression is the result of the cognitive activity of the speakers. Cognitive activity and communication are inseparable, with linguistic expression being one of the primary means of human communication. One important implication is that the biblical text is the direct product of thought or cognitive activity. Exploring the role played by this cognitive activity is, then, a legitimate part of interpretation.

One of the consequences of a flat-text approach is that the interpreter is left with little more than the immediate textual context from which to determine a word's meaning. In fact, in this approach, context is primarily viewed as the surrounding text in which the word being studied is found. The primary role of context, seen from this point of view, is to limit the meanings that could have been in the author's mind as he wrote. A word still has all the meanings, and context filters out the meanings which do not fit. As stated by Cotterell and Turner, "The context of the utterance usually singles out the *one* sense, which is intended, from amongst the various senses of which the word is potentially capable" (Cotterell and Turner 1989:175).

A more refined and linguistically informed notion of context has indeed been helpful; the context certainly does play a significant role in interpretation, but some studies give the impression that context is the only determining factor in establishing meaning. Yet, exactly what the context is, remains quite vague.

A review of recent exegesis texts reveals this imprecise perspective of context, as exemplified in Erickson's *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis: Taking the Fear Out of Critical Method*. "In general, the meaning of a given word in a given context will be *the simplest meaning—the least full meaning*—necessary for the word to make sense in that context, except in the case of a pun. That is, we can use the context to eliminate all possible senses but one for a potentially ambiguous term" (Erickson 2005:107).

But what is this "simplest meaning," and how does the normal exegete know when he or she has found it? Is the *right* meaning always the simplest, least full meaning? Is the "least full meaning" the only meaning allowed in a given context? If a principle like this is applied consistently, other questions arise. For example, what happens with New Testament citations of the Old Testament where it just does not seem reasonable to say that the New Testament author was reading the simplest, least full meaning? How does a statement like this fit with discussions of *sensus plenior*?

Unfortunately, when referring to the biblical studies literature to establish word meanings, the exegete finds a mixed bag. Consider the following from Witherington's commentary on Galatians:

> The two verbs here give a clearer picture of what happened. They suggest a gradual, perhaps even a reluctant or uneasy withdrawal on the part of Peter. The verb ὑποστέλλω is once again a military or political term describing a retreat or a retrenchment to an inconspicuous sheltered position (cf. Polybius 1.16.10; 6.40.14; 7.17.1; cf. Plutarch *Demetrius* 47,912E). As Betz suggests, "this may mean that Paul views Peter's actions as pragmatic, or a tactical maneuver, not one based on convictions." (Witherington 1998:154)

In the Greek texts cited above, the verb ὑποστέλλω is undoubtedly found in contexts where the retreat did take place to "an inconspicuous sheltered position." But the argument here is that the verb ὑποστέλλω *means* "retreat or a retrenchment to an inconspicuous sheltered position." This "meaning" is not available from the immediate textual context, but is a type of semantic transfer from other occurrences of the verb. This is not necessarily illegitimate totality transfer; even so, the commentator's argument is based on some level of semantic transfer into the local context of Galatians. It is not uncommon to find this type of comment in the literature, so what is a translator to do? Some commentators appear to argue that the immediate context is determinative, while others argue convincingly for rich meanings that come from uses of the word in other literature. This situation underscores the need to answer the following questions:

- How do words mean what they mean?

- How much meaning from one context can legitimately be carried over to a new context?

Another level of difficulty emerges from studies of intertextuality within the biblical text, not to mention rabbinic exegesis, which seem to be in conflict with the flat-text position briefly described above. These studies highlight the apparent interconnectedness of word meanings in different parts of the biblical text and raise questions about how to reconcile them with the notion of illegitimate totality transfer. It is important to acknowledge that this principle was intended to curtail the illegitimate transfer of the totality of meaning into every context in which a particular word occurs and not to sever the legitimate semantic connection between the various occurrences of a word. But what are the legitimate semantic connections?

We will leave this hanging for now and move on to the discussion of how all of this impacts the selection and translation of what we call key terms.

4. Implications for Key Terms

Even though a translator may acknowledge that one-to-one correspondences between languages are seldom possible, there still seems to be a high value placed on matching terms, especially when it has to do with what is perceived as a key biblical term. The comment by translators that "this language has no word for that!" betrays the underlying expectation that this language *should* have a word for that. This is one of the most challenging aspects of these discussions: The key biblical term is identified, then everything that it means is discussed with the hope that an equivalent term will be found in the receptor language that expresses all the original meaning. Depending on what the exegete has studied, "all the original meaning" may include many meanings enriched by the type of semantic transfer exemplified by the citation from Witherington in section 3. This makes it seem even more impossible to find an adequate term, making the translator feel like the translation would be so much better if they could only find that magic word.

Let us return to the Mapuche example *werken* (see section 2). In the early stages of translation, *werken* seemed to be an adequate term for prophet. Later on in the process, however, *werken* was no longer deemed adequate. What happened? Figure 1 graphically represents what seems to occur as translators become more familiar with a key biblical term.

The translator starts out with limited information or knowledge associated with the biblical term compared with all of the readily accessible information associated with the vernacular term *werken*. Early on *werken* seemed more than adequate to cover the basic meaning of prophet as "messenger." However, as the translators learned more nuances of the meaning of prophet, it seemed less and less likely that *werken* could ever mean all that prophet means.

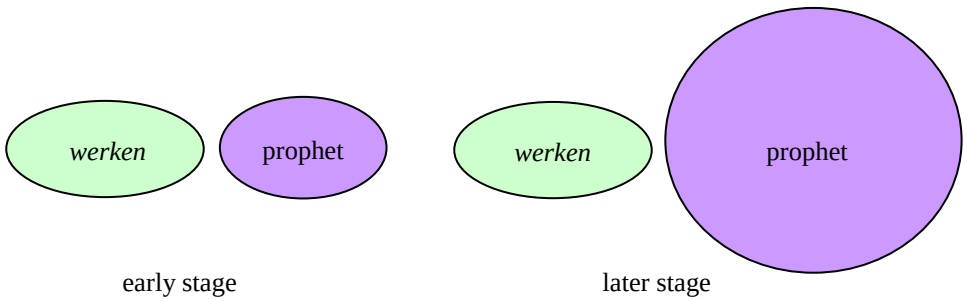

Figure 1: Expanded understanding of a key biblical term.

These decisions are typically made like this: "*Werken* covers part of what a prophet is and does, but not everything. *Pürofeta* should be used since people are already familiar with this borrowed biblical word and what it means." There is usually a genuine concern that a known vernacular term may introduce meanings that were not part of the original context. This can often tip the scales in favor of a borrowed term. Of course, using the borrowed term raises other questions about how widely known the term actually is—since much of the population may be unchurched, or less fluent in the national language—and what the ramifications are of using a term that may communicate very little.

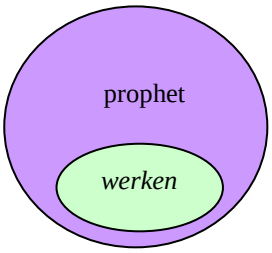

Figure 2: Lack of correspondence between a known vernacular term and a key biblical term.

Figure 2 illustrates that, through study and team discussions, the knowledge associated with prophet increases whereas the meaning of *werken* seems unchanged. The translators' impression is that there is no way the known term *werken* can cover all the rich meanings of prophet. This perceived lack of correspondence between a known term and its intended meaning often leads to borrowing the source language term. Stated in this way, it is hard to argue against these facts, but is this the only way to see what is happening here?

Now we move to a discussion of lexical pragmatics to see what help can be found to deal with the questions raised.

5. Lexical Pragmatics

Lexical pragmatics is a relatively new field of study. As Wilson (2006:1.1) comments, "It's only in the last five years or so that pragmatists have begun to look systematically at how the semantics/pragmatics distinction applies at the level of the word, and to talk of a separate domain of 'lexical pragmatics.'"

It is precisely this semantics/pragmatics distinction that promises a way forward in the midst of some of the perplexing and recurring questions that surround the selection of key terms for their use in translation.

In this section we introduce lexical pragmatics, presenting the foundational notions of representation, underdeterminacy, dynamic context, and the principle of relevance. In sections 6 and 7 we will consider how these notions impact the relationship of words and concepts in communication, and then propose a way forward in the hermeneutical challenges involved in the translation of key terms.

5.1. Representation

Representation is an essential feature of human language. Words spoken are not the things themselves—they are mere representations. A very mundane example would be a typical grocery list. It would be ludicrous to take the actual things with us that we need to buy when a list of words, abbreviations, or symbols that represent those things will suffice. Whether words represent edible items on a grocery list or philosophical concepts, their function is the same—they provide language users with an efficient way to verbally represent their thoughts.

This is a basic concept in Saussure's (1959[1915]) signifier-signified, but the goal of this article is to highlight representation as a fundamental characteristic of language at all levels and in all spheres of usage. Representation is the unifying function involved in what are sometimes referred to as concrete, abstract, or metaphorical types of language. The traditional distinction between concrete and abstract breaks down whenever any material object being referred to is not in my immediate physical space. If it is not tangible or touchable and I only refer to it with words, it is just as abstract as any concept that can also be represented with words.

From this perspective, metaphor is not a unique type of language, but rather employs the normal stuff of which language is made. Some metaphors may be new and very creative, but this does not make them another kind of language. The linguistic potential for metaphor is nothing more than representation in action.

5.2. Underdeterminacy

Underdeterminacy goes hand-in-hand with the representational nature of language. This needs to be embraced, not as an unfortunate deficiency of human language, but rather as a reflection of its incredible efficiency. Underdeterminacy has always been a characteristic of human language—it is not a postmodern notion imposed on language. When the biblical books were authored, underdeterminacy was just as much a feature of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek as it is of English today; it is not a recent intruder. A prism which breaks light up into its "constituent spectral colours" (Wikipedia) does not change the light itself, but rather brings out inherent features of light. In the same way, viewing language through a cognitive prism has not changed language but rather has brought out some "constituent colors" of language that were previously not in focus. In Brazilian Portuguese there is an expression: *Para bom entendedor meia palavra basta*, "For the person who understands well, half a word is sufficient."[2] This reveals an intuitive sense of this feature of language, even though it is not referred to as underdeterminacy.

Carston states it this way: "The meaning encoded in the linguistic expressions used, the relatively stable meanings in a linguistic system, meanings which are widely shared across a community of users of the system, underdetermines the proposition expressed (what is said)" (Carston 2002:19-20).

This is what Wilson (2006) refers to as the gap between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning. In relevance theory (RT) terms, this gap is bridged by the pragmatic process of inference, which is at the heart of communication. Based on certain premises, conclusions are drawn (or inferred) that are warranted by those premises as the hearer's or interpreter's cognitive systems go "online" to process what has been communicated. Inference, however, must be understood along with the notion of context, which is discussed in the next section. More will be said about inference later on.

5.3. The dynamic nature of context

Context is often identified as one of the key elements in arriving at the appropriate meaning of a word. The role of context is acknowledged, but the expression "in *this* context" can mean a variety of things—it could be grammatical, syntactic, rhetorical, authorial, social, political, theological, canonical, etc. Unfortunately, the notion of context is often vaguely defined, which makes it seem that different meanings are legitimate, depending on the particular aspect of the context that the interpreter chooses to emphasize. The RT notion of context, as defined by Sperber and Wilson is, "that part of the interlocutors' mutual cognitive environment which interacts with the utterance to provide a *coherent interpretation* of the utterance" (Sperber and Wilson 1986:15).

Context is part of the network of encyclopedic knowledge that the listener or reader brings to his or her understanding of the text. Context includes what has been referred to as background information, but this is only one part of the holistic, online, pragmatic notion employed here.

Context, as employed here, is dynamic in nature. It is always being modified and shaped as communication occurs. To use the technical term in RT, this is done in an *ad hoc* way (not to be confused with a process that is totally random and unprincipled). Ad hoc, or dynamic online interpretation, refers to the fact that word meanings are not pre-determined or pre-established. One of the implications of this dynamic notion of context is that encountering a word in context does not mean that the reader/hearer suddenly needs to choose the most appropriate meaning from among a set of possible predetermined meanings.

5.4. The principle of relevance

This is where the principle of relevance comes into play. The online, dynamic assessment of relevance limits the options as communication proceeds. "According to relevance theory, utterances raise *expectations of relevance*, and the comprehension process involves *mutual adjustment* of explicit content, context and cognitive effects in order to satisfy the particular expectations of relevance raised by the utterance" (Wilson 2006:6.6–7).

[2] Vilson Scholz, Brazilian Bible Society, personal communication. The translation is mine.

The dynamic process of mutual adjustment is pragmatic in nature. According to research by Barsalou (1987) the ad hoc formation of concepts is impacted by the following:

- linguistic context
- accessibility of assumptions
- considerations of relevance

Also important to consider here are the notions of lexical narrowing and lexical broadening. In lexical narrowing, "the concept expressed is more specific than the concept encoded," whereas in lexical broadening, "the concept expressed is more general than the concept encoded" (Wilson 2006:8.1).

It is at this point that these notions—representation, underdeterminacy, dynamic context, and the principle of relevance—all come together as facets of a unified whole. Language, as representation, is by definition underdetermined but this works efficiently as the principle of relevance operates in the dynamic context of communication.

6. Lexical Pragmatism and the Relationship of Words and Concepts

Let us reconsider Silva's question cited in section 3, "If the purpose of the book is to investigate the theological thought of the New Testament, why do it in a book organized under words?" (Silva 1995:19). One response evoked by this question is: What other option is there for organizing a theological dictionary? This is not intended as a sarcastic remark—the problem is not so much the dictionary's use of words to organize its entries as it is the expectation that a dictionary of words should be one thing and a dictionary of concepts would be something different. This underscores the need for clarity regarding the relationship of words and concepts. Lexical pragmatics can help bring clarity to this relationship.

In *Thoughts and Utterances*, Carston states that "words encode concept templates" (Carston 2002:360). This statement reflects the representational, underdeterminate nature of language. As Lee comments, words are "tools for causing speakers to access specific parts of their knowledge base" (Lee 2002:5). As "concept templates," words are like addresses within a speaker's encyclopedic knowledge, as illustrated in figure 3.

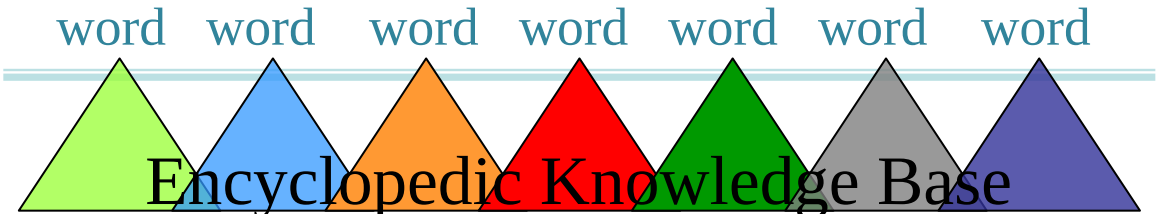

Figure 3: Words as concept templates.

In "Lectures on Lexical Pragmatics," Wilson states, "The claim tacitly made in this model is that word meanings are *concepts*, and that concepts represent *categories* of objects, events or properties in the world" (Wilson 2006:2.1). This applies to all words, not only those that are considered key terms. This is an important point to emphasize in this discussion of key terms. The very perception and definition of key biblical terms need to be reconsidered. A term is typically defined as "key" when two factors intersect: 1) the word is deemed of theological and/or conceptual significance and 2) the biblical meaning of the word is unfamiliar in the receptor language. The theological and/or conceptual significance often goes hand-in-hand with a level of semantic complexity that is not associated with non-key terms, but the essential word-concept relationship prevails.

The preposition "in" is an example of a word that is not typically identified as a key term, but a concept template. The label concept template makes a lot of sense when "in" is seen as an indicator of, or pointer to, spatial, temporal, and logical relations. However, the theological and conceptual significance typically associated with a key term comes into focus with the frequent New Testament expression "in Christ." "In" functions just like any word, by providing an access-point to the speaker's encyclopedic knowledge. In this

case, "in" points to the speaker's knowledge of the various relationships communicated by "in." This, then, becomes operative in the different New Testament contexts in which the expression "in Christ" occurs.

But as concept templates, words do not *mean everything, everywhere*. The encyclopedic information is part of the interpreter's cognitive environment that he or she brings to the communicative event. This may seem like a subtle distinction to make—and could be interpreted as unnecessary—but words themselves do not line up with every possible meaning for the interpreter to select from by a process of elimination; meaning is the result of words providing access to the interpreter's cognitive context, leading to the intended inference. All the possible meanings are not present in every occurrence of a word; the word merely sets up the appropriate inferential process to lead the interpreter to the intended meaning.

This again shows the interrelationship of the representational, underdeterminate nature of language. The words in textual communication are not where the meaning resides. The words point the interpreter to infer the intended meaning, drawing upon his or her encyclopedic knowledge. This process of inference takes place guided by the principle of relevance in the dynamic, holistic context of the communication event. In their function as concept templates, words are chosen on the basis of this dynamic, holistic context of communication. The interpretation of text must take into account this same dynamic, holistic context of communication rather than be limited to the immediate textual context (or co-text).

According to this model, the relationship of words and concepts is expressed well in Carston's phrase, "Words encode concept templates." This reflects the efficiency of the underdeterminate character of language. The concept associated with a word is the rich, broad encyclopedic knowledge which the interpreter brings to the communication event.

This direct word-as-concept-template relationship is only part of what goes on in communication, however. If this word-concept relationship is all we have, we will get lost in all the encyclopedic information associated with a word. The principle of (or expectation of) relevance in the actual dynamic context of communication is what guides the interpreter to the proper inferences, and guards against the pitfalls of the illegitimate totality transfer. The totality is there as part of the encyclopedic knowledge, but only what is warranted by the online expectation of relevance will come into play in the communication.

7. Implications for Key Biblical Terms

This section will consider the implications of these principles of lexical pragmatics for the interpretive process involved in key term study and selection. One of the first steps is to propose a reconsideration of the label "key term" based on the preceding discussion of the relationship of words and concepts. Subsequent sections will tease out how the principles discussed above impact this part of the translation process.

7.1. Reconsideration of the label "key term"

The example of *werken* illustrates well the need for a reclassification of terms. As stated in sections 2 and 4, in the early stages of the translation process, *werken* seemed like a good option for the key word prophet. After becoming more familiar with the biblical context and information associated with the word prophet, *werken* seemed less capable of communicating the full meaning of prophet. This is not meant to deny the value of studying the cultural and historical background of the biblical text, but it can have a crippling effect on the translator if a strong word-as-concept-template principle is not in place. Learning all the rich, broad meanings of the biblical term can easily lead to the impression that no vernacular term could ever be good enough. But both words need to be seen as encoding concept templates.

One of the dangers of intensive study of the biblical text and how words are used there is that we can easily read more into words than the original author had in mind at the time of writing. This could be considered a variety of illegitimate totality transfer in the sense that the translator might feel like *werken* needs to mean everything that prophet means. The implication of seeing both words as concept templates is that both words function as underdeterminate pointers to the pertinent elements of the interpreter's encyclopedic information. As a concept template, in any given context the meaning of prophet is only a part of the whole. This is important for both interpreter and translator to understand—all the meaning of a word or key

term does not reside in each occurrence in the text. Similarly, all the potential meanings are not equally activated in every communication situation.

Many discussions of key terms that take place among translators are, in fact, discussions of *key concepts*, which happen to be encoded by certain terms. Understanding this involves an adjustment of expectations. Most translators recognize that one-to-one correspondences are seldom found between words, so this is not an unfamiliar idea. The critical issue with key terms is the result of a word-concept mismatch which can produce great frustration when the translator is looking for an adequate term to express a whole concept. This is why, as stated above, a strong word-as-concept-template principle needs to be in place for both languages. The translator's task should be conceived of as finding an adequate concept template in the vernacular to fulfill the function of the concept template used in the original communication.

One recommendation that emerges here is for translators to begin to speak of *key biblical concepts* rather than key terms.

7.2. Evaluation of potential words to encode key concepts

The word-as-concept-template principle also impacts the evaluation of the adequacy of potential words. Based on awareness of the underdeterminate nature of words, a potential word is evaluated, not on the basis of how well it expresses the whole concept encoded by the original, but on the basis of whether it triggers essential inferences that lead to interpretive resemblance. Referring again to the section 4 example, it appears in retrospect that *werken* could meet this word-as-concept-template criterion. The decision against using *werken* for prophet appears to have been based on the expectation, as stated above, that it needed to cover all the various meanings of prophet in all its occurrences.

This allows—or requires—the translator to focus more attention on whether the meaning inferred by a word like *werken* is within acceptable parameters. The concept to which *werken* points the reader may not include much of the encyclopedic information that was available in the original situation, but this does not disqualify *werken*, as long as it sets up an appropriate process of inference. Missing contextual information can be supplied in a variety of ways to enrich the reader's encyclopedic information. For readers of the biblical text, exposure to the variety of contexts in which a word is used is one of the best ways to enrich the encyclopedic information. For translators of the biblical text, the recommendation is similar: Translate passages from a variety of contexts in which a word like *werken* might be used to allow for enrichment of the concept.

7.3. The attributive use of concepts

Another notion from lexical pragmatics that is useful to this discussion is referred to as the echoic or attributive use of concepts. This is when "a word or phrase is used to represent a concept whose content the speaker need not fully understand or endorse, but wants to attribute to someone else" (Wilson 2006:8.1). According to Wilson, this notion plays a major role in lexical acquisition, which can be extended to concept acquisition. With specific reference to child language acquisition, she comments:

> The child constantly hears utterances containing unfamiliar words, some of which will encode concepts he has not yet acquired (because he has not yet encountered any gerbils). As a result, he will be unable to represent the full proposition expressed by the utterance that contains them. Still, he may well understand enough to recover at least some of its logical and contextual implications. (Wilson 2006:8.6)

This phenomenon is pervasive enough that Wilson (2006:8.8) comments, "It is quite conceivable, in fact, that there are certain concepts which we all use attributively or echoically all the time, and which no-one fully understands at all." This is certainly true of medical terms. When a doctor tells us that we have something called fibromyalgia, we hope his or her understanding exceeds our own. The fact that I may be able to recover only minimal logical and contextual implications does not prevent me from using or knowing the concept.

I propose that many key biblical terms are also used in this echoic or attributive way. Redemption, sanctification, justification, atonement, propitiation, etc. are merely the beginning of a very long list we

could make. Merely giving someone the theological definition of one of these terms does little to enrich the concept which the term encodes. Concepts such as these are enriched through a pragmatic process of life as the reader/listener interacts with the stories which flesh out the encyclopedic information associated with the concept.

With regard to the kind of key term discussions in the context of a new translation, the echoic or attributive use also applies. In early stages of exposure to a key biblical term, the reader or hearer will use both a vernacular term and a borrowed term attributively, with minimal understanding. This notion expresses well the intuitive sense of the Mapuche translation team when the decision was made to use *pürofeta* rather than *werken*: "Even though people may not fully understand *pürofeta*, they will eventually learn what it means." What we overlooked in that decision was that the same would have been true of *werken*. Had *werken* been used, it would have been quite attributive at first, but exposure to Scripture and other contexts of use would have enriched the concept encoded by *werken*. In fact, the process probably would have required less time since many connections to appropriate encyclopedic information were already well established.

The dynamic nature of concept formation indicates that *werken* would have undergone the normal pragmatic processes operative in all communication. As pointed out by Barsalou (1987), the use of *werken* would be impacted by the linguistic context, the accessibility of assumptions, and considerations of relevance. This lends significant support to the conclusion that *werken* probably would have been the better choice as the term to encode the key concept.

8. Conclusions

Bible translators are genuinely concerned that their work be properly understood. This is typically what motivates long discussions as they seek the most appropriate words to communicate the key concepts and meanings in the biblical text. It is the author's hope that this article contributes to our understanding of the communication process involved in the translation and interpretation of the biblical text.

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