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Towards a Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Study of Theological Influence in Bible Translation

CHAO-CHUN LIU
Durham University
chao-chun.liu@durham.ac.uk

Abstract: Although Bible scholars have generally acknowledged that theology plays an important role in Bible translation, affecting it from beginning to end, no studies have been done to date to offer a systematic, theoretical explanation of this phenomenon, thus leaving this subject a largely unmapped territory for study. As an initial attempt to fill this gap, this paper explores theological influence in Bible translation in terms of its theoretical foundation and seeks to find suitable theoretical concepts from both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies in order to construct a theoretical framework that can be used to sharpen and enrich the study of this phenomenon. The paper first addresses the generally negative or fearful attitude toward the subject and then explores the possibility of applying the theoretical concepts of norms (Toury and Chesterman), narrative (Baker), constraints (Lefevere), "*Skopos*" (Nord), "contextual frame of reference" (Wendland), and "Bible translation polysystem theory" (Kerr) for developing a theoretically-sound, disciplined, and comprehensive study of theological influence in Bible translation. Convinced that Bible translation is inherently a theological task and it is important to enhance our understanding of the theological nature and dimension of Bible translation for theoretical, pedagogical, and translational purposes, this paper proposes that with these five theoretical frameworks at our disposal, it is possible for the multifaceted theological influence involved in Bible translation to be studied in a more objective and systematic way in order to achieve a greater awareness and understanding of their profound and consequential interrelationships.

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1 Introduction

This paper will explore the phenomenon of theological influence in Bible translation in terms of its theoretical foundation, and seeks to find suitable theoretical concepts from both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies[1] to construct a theoretical framework that can be used to sharpen and enrich the study, description, and explanation of this phenomenon. The fundamental conviction of this endeavor is that Bible translation is inherently a theological task, and to enhance our understanding of the theological nature and dimension of Bible translation for theoretical, pedagogical, and translational purposes, a suitable systematic framework must be developed for a theoretically-sound, disciplined, and comprehensive study of theological influence in Bible translation to be achieved.

2 Theoretical foundations of theological influence in Bible translation

Although many Bible scholars have acknowledged that theology plays an important role in Bible translation, affecting it from beginning to end,[2] no studies have been done to date to offer a systematic, theoretical explanation of this phenomenon, let alone to situate such an explanation within the theoretical landscapes of both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies. As a result, there has been no theoretical framework proposed for theological influence in Bible translation to be assessed systematically,[3] thus leaving this subject a largely unmapped territory for study. The lack of a theoretical or even general interest in studying this subject can be partially explained by the predominantly negative or fearful attitude toward it among Bible translation theorists—particularly the fear of broaching issues of theology since it is a controversial and debatable subject among both scholars and

[1] Wendland (2012) has been using the term "biblical translation studies" in reference to the field of Bible translation in order to alert scholars in the secular field of translation studies that there have been many others doing theoretical and practical work besides Eugene Nida and Ernst-August Gutt.

[2] For example, see the 2002 special issue of *The Bible Translator* on *Translation and Theology*. Also see Arichea (1982, 1990); Smalley (1991); Blumczynski (2006). Ogden wrote, "[Bible translation] is a theological task from beginning to end—from interpretation to choice of word or phrase" (2002:316).

[3] Blumczynski proposed using the concept of "over-translation" (2006:49) to describe theological influence in Bible translation, but this is far from being a theoretical framework and is also a problematic description, as will be addressed in this paper.

lay-people alike.[4] In the relatively rare cases when theological influence in Bible translation is recognized by modern Bible translation theorists, it is often perceived "as a significant threat to translation accuracy" (Blumczynski 2006:51) and "is generally disapproved of and criticized, as manifested in the common use of negatively marked terms, such as *bias*, *prejudice*, or *slant*" (Blumczynski 2006:252, emphasis original).

Blumczynski (2006)—so far the most extensive scholarly work devoted to studying theological influence in Bible translation—can be seen as a corrective to this negative attitude by comparing sixty-two modern English Bible translations, showing how all of them are to various degrees influenced by theology, and demonstrating that "Bible translation is necessarily a theological task," that "no translation of the Bible may be legitimately conceived of as theologically impartial or doctrinally neutral," and that Bible translation "necessarily becomes an act of translation of the *doctrine* perceived in the source text rather than the text itself" (252, italics added). Concluding that every Bible translation inevitably has a doctrinal profile shaped by the theological views of its translators, he proposes that "the theological markedness of the respective Bible versions, universal and unavoidable as it is, [should] be appreciated rather than resented" (253). He further suggests that interpretational divergence in translation, if evaluated critically, "may only contribute to **a fuller understanding of the message**...of the Scripture" (253, emphasis original). However, even though he went to such great lengths to demonstrate the theological nature of Bible translation, paradoxically, he himself still chooses to use the terms *interference* and *over-translation* to describe theological influence in Bible translation (45–51). This shows that even to one who is fully convinced of the theological nature of Bible translation, theological influence is still perceived negatively as interference leading to over-translation, as most Bible translation theorists typically do.

As a result of this predominantly negative view of theological influence in Bible translation, statements like the following abound in both scholarly and popular literature on Bible translation: "[R]esponsible translation...aims to avoid any sectarian or theologically biased rendering in either the text or notes, endeavoring to present the text in as impartial a way as possible" (Ogden 2002:313). The problem with this kind of statement is that it is an illusion, for it presupposes the existence of a theologically "non-sectarian," "unbiased," "impartial" translation, which simply does not exist, as Blumczynski also notes (2006:252). Just in English alone, there are now over 450 translations of the Bible. Which of these is the non-sectarian and unbiased standard version?

[4] The author owes this insight to Ernst R. Wendland (personal communication, September 23, 2021).

This is not to say that there is no such thing as bias in Bible translation or there are absolutely no standards at all within portions of Christianity regarding how the Bible, at least for the most part, should be translated. There are certainly linguistic standards and norms that generally delimit the acceptable range of possible translations. But within this general acceptable range, even key passages associated with essential Christian doctrines have been translated in many different ways throughout history—though not necessarily altering the essential doctrines. Moreover, even among conservative Christians who adhere to a similar set of traditional doctrines, key Bible passages have also been translated in a variety of ways in the numerous Bible versions they use, as Blumczynski (2006) fully demonstrates. Thus, it is virtually impossible to arrive at a universal agreement among all Christians regarding which Bible translations—even just for one single passage, let alone for the whole Bible—are theologically sectarian and biased, and which ones are not.

This should be no surprise to those familiar with the history of Christianity. For beyond the basic tenets which define Christianity in general,[5] there has always been a wide spectrum of different beliefs held by the numerous branches and communities within Christianity, most if not all of whom have always considered themselves orthodox, i.e., holding the most correct theological doctrines, and would vehemently reject being called sectarian or theologically biased. What is perfectly "orthodox" to one group may seem totally "sectarian" and "biased" to another. Who, then, is to be the judge? According to which tradition—Catholic, Protestant (which branch?), or Eastern Orthodox? How about Christian groups who do not identify themselves with any of these traditions? Thus, for the most part, it is problematic if not misleading to use terms like "sectarian," "biased," "interference," or "over-translation," for they are neither a helpful nor accurate way of describing Bible translation, except in rare, extreme cases where theologically motivated translations are so baseless and contradictory to the Biblical source text that they are universally rejected by Christians as an illegitimate translation.

However, the problematic statement about Bible translation needing to be theologically non-sectarian or unbiased reflects the deeper presupposition of many theorists who consider it as mainly an inter-lingual and inter-cultural linguistic activity that can and should be free from theological interference and thus be theologically neutral. To ensure theological neutrality, the common modern practice is to entrust Bible translation to theologically diverse committees rather than individuals. But is the Bible translation produced by

[5] But even questions about what these tenets are and how they should be understood cannot be answered easily and have always been fraught with different opinions and controversies.

theologically diversified committees necessarily neutral or impartial? Blumczynski thinks not, as he observed,

> It must be recognized that translation projects undertaken or supervised by theologically diversified committees, in pursuit of broad acceptability may tend to introduce *a different kind of theological interference* manifested in excessive generality and doctrinal inoffensiveness arrived at by means of *a theological consensus at the expense of the fidelity to the source text*, as perceived by the individual members of the committee (52, emphasis added).

In other words, a "theologically neutralized" translation may suffer from a different kind of "theological interference" than a theologically non-neutralized translation may. Moreover, a theologically neutralized version also presupposes a universal standard according to which everything can be judged to be either falling on one side or the other or as extreme or not, but who has the right to set up this standard? In any case, the setting up of that standard would be the result of a theological interpretative decision, and therefore such a standard would be as much a theological interpretation and may exert as much theological influence on Bible translation as any other theological interpretation. Although this may sound like the postmodernist view that "there is no pure objectivity" and "everything is tainted by observer's subjectivity,"[6] the above observation is less to introduce a postmodernist worldview on Bible translation than to simply bring what many Bible translation scholars have already recognized to its logical conclusion: that is, since Bible translation has been recognized by many Bible translation scholars as necessarily a theological task, then, logically, Bible translation can never be free from theological influence. The reason for this is simple: the Bible is a theological text, so translating it necessarily involves theological interpretation (thus, a "theological task"), which depends on the translators' theological stance (Zogbo 2002:121); therefore, Bible translation will inevitably be influenced by the translators' stance formed by their theological background and context. Such an understanding of the theological nature of Bible translation can be considered the theoretical foundation for studying theological influence in Bible translation and can be represented by the following premises:

> Premise 1: Translation necessarily involves interpretation.
> Premise 2: The Bible is a theological text.

[6] There is no doubt that one's theological view may be described as "observer's subjectivity," for theological view is a highly subjective matter.

Premise 3: Following from premises 1 and 2, Bible translation necessarily involves the interpretation of a theological text, i.e., theological interpretation.

Premise 4: One's theological interpretation depends on one's theological stance, which is formed by one's theological background and context.

Premise 5: Therefore, Bible translation is necessarily influenced by the translators' theological background and context.

Notice how "background" and "context" are separately defined above, for while theological influence in Bible translation is inevitable because no Bible translation can be done in a theological vacuum, such theological influence may not necessarily come from the translators' own theological background. For example, it is possible for a Lutheran translator (Lutheran being his or her theological background) to be employed to translate a Bible for a Methodist Bible society or a Methodist church and be required to follow Methodist theological interpretation for this translation project (this being his current theological context). Of course, in this context, the translator may still consciously or unconsciously translate in a way that expresses his or her Lutheran interpretation, but he or she will more likely make a conscious effort to meet the requirements of this project for professional, ethical, and practical reasons, e.g., to avoid problems. In any case, theological influence in Bible translation is inevitable, and as such, it should not be perceived primarily in negative terms because of the problematic presupposition associated with those terms. Now, what would be a more positive and accurate way to describe theological influence in Bible translation? How does the theoretical foundation presented above fit into the theoretical landscapes of both the field of translation studies and Biblical translation studies? Moreover, what can a study focusing on the theological influence on Bible translation contribute to the theoretical developments in both of these fields?

3 Useful theoretical concepts in translation studies

As mentioned earlier, in Blumczynski (2006), the problematic concept of "over-translation" was proposed to describe theological influence in Bible translation. Although defined as including both "over-translation" and "under-translation," covering "all instances of deviation from the theological content of the source text, either toward greater or lesser specificity" (2006:49), this definition falls prey to the same problem of presupposing the existence of one universal standard of Bible translation, which simply does not exist, at least not in the truly

universal sense.[7] Who then is to determine what constitutes a "deviation" and what "the theological content of the source text" should be? Even the very notion of biblical "source text" itself is a matter of debate, e.g., whether or not to include the Deuterocanonical books, and if so, which ones? Moreover, is there only one legitimate interpretation of that "theological content"?[8] No one can answer these questions in a way that would be accepted by all Christians today.[9] Thus, a more suitable way of describing theological influence in Bible translation still needs to be found. For this, we now turn to a few useful theoretical concepts that have been developed in the field of translation studies.

3.1 Norms

As our aim is to assess theological influence in Bible translation, this enquiry naturally falls into the type of research in the field of translation studies called "descriptive translation studies" (Hermans 2020). It is in this sub-domain of translation studies that we find a useful conceptual tool for our enquiry, called "norms." The concept of norms in translation studies, first introduced by Toury (1978) to refer to "regularities of translation behavior within a specific sociocultural situation" (Baker 2009:189), is a useful conceptual tool for describing theological influence because just as norms can function as "performance instructions" (Toury 1980:51; 1995:55) or "correctness notions" (Bartsch 1987:xiv; Chesterman 2016:52) to translators, so can theological concepts to Bible translators, informing them as to which way of translation is

[7] Within certain faith communities during certain periods, there may be an "authorized" version that is generally held by those communities as the "standard version" against which all other Bible translations can be evaluated, such as the Vulgate for the Catholic Church or the King James Version for some Protestant churches and communities. But that is far from a universally accepted standard among *all* Christians.

[8] This is clearly not how medieval theologians read the Bible, who commonly speak of the "four senses" of the Scriptures, i.e., how there can be four levels of meaning or interpretation for one Bible passage—literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical.

[9] Unlike the Quran, the Bible as a whole never exists as only one unique language version without any translations but always exists in different translations throughout history. Thus, the one who can answer all these questions must be one who possesses the supreme interpretative and translational authority over the Biblical source text for a certain Christian community, during a certain period of time, and over a certain geographical region. But church history shows that there was never a time when the entire realm of Christianity was ruled over by only one supreme interpretative and translational authority, not even during the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed something close to that, for there have always been Christian groups that do not follow the authority of the Catholic Church. See Broadbent (2000).

theologically "correct" or "appropriate." Moreover, the concept of norm is built on a fundamental premise shared by the present research: that is, translating is a decision-making process involving interpretative decisions, and between the two extreme poles of translational decisions that are fully predetermined (constrained by structural differences between languages), and totally idiosyncratic (wholly gratuitous one-off choices), norms function to explain why translators tend to make certain decisions rather than others (73–74).

Thus, the premise of the concept of norms matches very well the premise of this study on the theological influence in Bible translation: that is, Bible translation is a decision-making process which involves many theological decisions in interpreting the Biblical text, and between the two extreme poles of translation decisions (fully predetermined or totally idiosyncratic), certain theological norms coming from both the translators' theological background and context as defined above may function to explain why they tend to make certain decisions. As Hermans suggests, the process of decision-making in translation "is in large measure, necessarily and beneficially, governed by norms," or else the translators faced with a source text "would either be unable to opt for one solution rather than another and throw up their hands in despair, or make entirely random decisions, like a computer gone haywire" (1996:28). The same can be said about Bible translation: without some kind of theological norms governing Bible translators' interpretative decisions, they would either be unable to make any interpretative decisions or would be making entirely random interpretative decisions. This shows how the concept of norms in translation studies provides a useful conceptual tool for describing theological influence in Bible translation, without the problematic presuppositions associated with terms like "sectarian," "biased," "neutral," "interference," and "over-translation," as seen earlier.

While there is still no agreed upon definition of norms in translation studies (Zwischenberger 2020:375), many definitions that have been assigned to this term are clearly applicable to studying the influence of theology in Bible translation. For example, Toury (1995) distinguishes three types of norms: preliminary, initial, and operational norms. In the case of Bible translation, preliminary norms, which determine the choice of texts to be translated, correspond to the selection of Greek or Hebrew texts as textual basis, the application of textual criticism in choosing among textual variants, and one's overall motive in Bible translation, i.e., why one chooses to translate the Bible. Initial norms, which determine whether a translation is oriented toward the norms of the source or target cultures, correspond to the extent one leans toward the dynamic/functional equivalent approach or the more traditional, essentially literal approach in Bible translation, the two main approaches in Bible translation (Ryken 2009; Grudem et al. 2005). Operational norms, which influence

the concrete choices during the translation process, correspond to all translational choices made during Bible translation. All these three categories of norms—preliminary, initial, and operational—in Bible translation are bound to be influenced by theology.

For example, regarding preliminary norms, a certain theological conviction may cause one to favor Textus Receptus over the Nestle-Aland text, whether in part or in whole. The "King James Only" advocates, many of whom believe that God has supernaturally preserved the Textus Receptus to be an inerrant text—a theological belief—is a case in point (White 2009). Those who do not hold such a belief may prefer the Nestle-Aland text, and such a choice may also be informed to some degree by the theological belief that God did not supernaturally preserve the Textus Receptus, but has allowed the development of textual criticism after hundreds of years to arrive at a text that is closer to the original. This illustrates that either one prefers Textus Receptus or the Nestle-Aland text, certain theological belief is at play.

Regarding initial norms, one's preference for the dynamic/functional equivalent approach or a more literal approach in Bible translation is also inevitably informed by theology, as the chosen degrees of literalness, contextualization, inculturation, or indigenization for Bible translation in part or in whole all depend on one's theological belief and interpretation regarding the message and the manner of communication intended by the divine Author. Regarding operational norms which cover all translational choices during Bible translation, the inevitability of theological influence has been discussed in the previous section and demonstrated by Blumczynski's work and others.[10] Thus, Toury's threefold typology of norms can serve as a helpful theoretical framework for examining and describing the various ways that theological concepts as norms may influence Bible translation.

Chesterman's categorization of norms into expectancy norms and professional norms (1997; 2016:62–68) is also applicable and provides an even more detailed theoretical framework for studying theological influence in Bible translation. First, according to Chesterman, expectancy norms are product norms, which are the readers' expectations of what a translation should be, and in the case of Bible translation, the readers' expectations of how Bible translation should be closely related to and informed by their theological concepts or convictions. For example, whether God should speak like a Californian teenager or an ancient king is not only a linguistic and cultural question but also a theological question. The readers' expectation of how the Bible and especially certain passages should be translated is most likely shaped by their church affiliation and theological background. A Catholic, for instance, would most likely

[10] See note 2.

expect to receive a Bible translation that follows the tradition of Catholic Bible translation, and a Protestant, the tradition of Protestant Bible translation, and so on.

Second, professional norms are process norms set by the professionals that regulate the translation process itself. In the field of Bible translation, these may include Bible translation scholars, Biblical language scholars, professional Bible translators/organizations, theologians, and church leaders. Each Bible translation project usually has its own set of professional standards, most likely decided upon by the initiators and sponsors of those projects. Chesterman's professional norms can be further subdivided into accountability, communication, and relation norms (2016:65–68), all of which also have a theological dimension.

First, for the accountability norms, which are the ethical norms concerning professional standards of integrity and thoroughness, the idea of integrity and thoroughness in Bible translation is closely related to theological tradition: what counts as integrity and thoroughness in Bible translation in one theological tradition may not be the same in another. Therefore, it is the theological tradition of what a certain Biblical text means which determines if its translation has been done with integrity and thoroughness. Accountability norms also describe the theological influences that a certain Bible society, Christian organization, or church may exert on Bible translators. Bible translators are often translating the Bible for these entities, to whom they are accountable, and thus they must meet their standards of integrity and thoroughness.

Second, for the communication norm, which is a social norm specifying the translator's role as a communication expert, the idea of "optimal communication" in Bible translation is again shaped by theological conviction: how the Bible should be best communicated is a theological question understood very differently among different Christian traditions[11] and between the advocates of dynamic/functional equivalent translation and those of essentially literal translation. Eastern Orthodoxy's theological view of the Bible as icons (Crisp 2002), according to which clarity and understandability is not emphasized in Bible translation, illustrates how a theological view may serve as a "communication norm" dictating how the Bible is supposed to be communicated.

[11] For example, the Catholic Church for a very long time (especially during the Middle Ages) did not believe that the Bible could be properly communicated to people through translations, and thus for many centuries translation of the Bible was banned. Generally speaking, there is still a great difference today in the theological understandings between Catholics and Protestants as to whether the Bible can be properly communicated to the common people without the interpretative guidance of ecclesiastical authorities and traditions.

Third, for the relation norm, the linguistic norm that determines what counts as an appropriate relation of relevant similarity between the source and target texts is also closely related to theological interpretation. Although linguistic norms (lexical norms, grammatical norms, syntactical norms, literary norms, etc.) may appear to be unrelated to theology, ultimately, it is often the theological interpretation of what the source text means that determines how all the linguistic elements of the source text should be translated into the target language, i.e., what counts as "an appropriate relation of relevant similarity" between the source and target texts.

Norms have been described as standing between the two poles of absolute idiosyncrasies and absolute rules (Toury 1995:54) or between judicial laws and conventions (Chesterman 2016:53). Applying to Bible translation, theological influence described as norms in Bible translation also vary in terms of their importance and binding force upon the translators. This provides another analytical lens through which theological influence can be assessed.

According to Chesterman, norms also function to promote values and the ideologies related to them (1999; Zwischenberger 2020:378). Theological norms in Bible translation also function to promote certain theological interpretations and traditions. For example, the theological norms of English Bible translation in translating ποιμένας (*poimenas*) in Ephesians 4:11 as "pastors" instead of "shepherds" and translating ἐπισκόποις (*episkopois*) in Philippians 1:1 and Acts 20:28 as "bishops" instead of "overseers," are clearly related to the promotion of the systems of pastors and bishops in certain Christian ecclesiastical traditions, which systems, however, are not accepted by other Christian traditions. This demonstrates how theological norms can very much act as the driving force behind certain theological concepts or traditions through Bible translation.

Furthermore, Chesterman's observation (2016:170–171) that norms are governed by value and embody or tend toward a certain value also provides useful insights for studying theological influence in Bible translation. Theological norms definitely embody certain values, and the most prominent or even ultimate value governing or embodied in theological norms probably is the belief that what the theological norms convey is "true according to God" or "faithful according to what God wants to say." At least among believers, theological concepts are usually presented and promoted because their presenters or promoters believe that these concepts are true or faithful according to God. This insight sheds further light on how theology may influence Bible translation: Bible translators—at least those who are Christians—would most likely translate a

passage in a way that they believed to be in line with God's intention,[12] except in rare cases where Bible translation is done under coercion or done by non-Christians or non-religionists for non-Christian or non-religious purposes where the question of God is out of the picture. For Bible translators, most of whom regard translating the Bible as an act of serving God, this "value" of "being true according to God" or "faithful according to what God wants to say" may be considered the ultimate value that transcends all other values, or the ultimate norm that transcends all other norms. This shows the supremacy of theological norms over other kinds of norms in Bible translation and hence the importance of studying them.

From the above discussion, the usefulness of the concept of norms to studying theological influence in Bible translation should be apparent, for just as no translation is done in a vacuum (Lefevere 1992; Levý 2000), no Bible translation is done in a vacuum—particularly a theological vacuum—as Bible translation necessarily requires theological interpretation (exegesis) which in turn depends on the theological stance of the translator (Zogbo 2002:121). Therefore, Bible translation is bound to be governed by its translators' theological stance, theological background, and theological context, all of which may give rise to certain theological norms. Thus, norm is a useful conceptual tool in analyzing and describing theological influence in Bible translation, and Toury's model of preliminary, initial, and operational norms, coupled with Chesterman's model of expectancy (product) norm and professional (process) norm with its further division into accountability (ethical), communication (social), and relation (linguistic) norms, provide a well-structured theoretical framework by which theological influence in Bible translation can be studied and explained. The importance of such a study to both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies can be seen from Herman's observation (1996:39):

> One of the major tasks of the researcher wishing to account for translation as a social practice consists in identifying and interpreting the norms which governed the translator's choices and decisions. The task extends to accounting, in given communities, at certain times or over a period of time, for the system of norms governing particular

[12] This involves the complex theological issue of "inspiration," i.e., does God really speak through the Scriptures, and in what sense and to what extent? While Bible translators do not all believe that the entire Scriptures are inspired by God and do not all understand "inspiration" in the same way, they all translate the Bible in a way that they believe to be ultimately according to what God wants, i.e., not knowingly contradicting God, unless they subscribe to an anti-God ideology.

domains of translation and the discursive models which inspired the norms.

This is how a study on theological influence in Bible translation may fit in and contribute to both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies. It is a descriptive study that aims to identify and interpret the theological norms that governed translators' choices and decisions in a certain Bible translation project and extends to account for the larger systems of theological norms governing Bible translation and the discursive models which inspired those norms in a particular context. As Chesterman proposes that translation theory should be (among other things) a normative discipline whose object is "the description, understanding, and explanation of translation norms" (2016:51), the aim of studying theological influence in Bible translation is to describe, understand, and explain the theological translation norms operating in a given Bible translation project. Moreover, both Toury and Chesterman agree that one reason for studying translations is "to discover the concept of 'equivalence' or 'relevant similarity' held by a particular translator or a particular culture at a given time, for a given kind of text. etc.," for "the boundaries of the concept 'translation' are ultimately not set by something intrinsic to the concept itself, but by the ways in which members of a culture use the concept" (60). Thus, a study on the theological influence in Bible translation may contribute to both translation studies and Biblical translation studies by discovering how theology, in a certain context (people, time, place, and text), may give rise to norms that shape the concepts of "equivalence," "relevant similarity," and "translation" for the translation of the Bible. This kind of research should also offer a fresh insight on how Bible translation is evaluated, for as Hermans (2010:147) noted, "to understand and speak about someone else's translation, we must translate that translation." In other words, we need to know why a translator has made certain decisions before we can reasonably assess the results of these decisions (Chesterman 2016:133–134). Thus, a further possible contribution this kind of study may bring to the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies is to highlight the norm-governed nature of translation and demonstrate that Bible translation cannot be understood and evaluated fairly apart from its norms, especially theological ones.

However, when primarily understood as socially constructed constraints on human behavior (Schäffner 1999), norms are inadequate to fully describe the phenomenon of theological influence in Bible translation. This is because the theological concepts of the translators are much closer to personal beliefs and convictions than social constraints. Theological beliefs are not just some kind of external customs and rules constructed by a society and passed down by practice or authorities for individuals to follow, although they certainly can be and have

been that way also, e.g., during the Middle Ages where many Europeans' theological beliefs were simply handed down to them by the Catholic Church as customs or rules to follow. But at least in Protestant Christianity, where religious freedom and the exercise of a person's free will are more highly valued and emphasized, theological beliefs are more often strong personal convictions freely exercised by individual believers, especially those who are religiously devoted enough to become Bible translators. William Tyndale would be a prime example of this, who ultimately died for his theological convictions in translating the Bible. This is especially so in the cases of Bible translations done by missionaries. For missionaries normally decide voluntarily to become missionaries to a foreign land, driven by strong theological beliefs. As such, especially in their Bible translation activities, they were not simply following some kind of norm as sociological behavioral custom or rule so that they can fit in certain social context. Rather, their activities were solely motivated by strong personal beliefs of what God has spoken, revealed to them, or motivated them to do. Thus, although the concept of norms is a helpful tool in describing theological influences on translation in translation studies terms, it cannot accurately describe the character and nature of theological beliefs of the translators in most cases of Bible translation.[13] Therefore, a better term or concept to describe theological influence would be the influence of *belief* or *conviction*, neither of which, however, have been fully studied and developed as a theoretical concept in translation studies. The closest (albeit also not fully adequate) terms and concepts that have been proposed and developed in the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies are, respectively, "narrative" and "cognitive frame of reference," which will be discussed below.

3.2 Narrative

The concept of narrative or the socio-narrative theory is expounded most extensively in the field of translation studies by Baker (2020:356–361; 2006).[14] Broadly defined as "an account of connected events occurring in space and over time" (2020:356) or "a story with a perceived beginning and a projected end" (2018:179), the term "narrative" is applicable to theology particularly when it is used as a sociological term, as "the principal mode by which we experience the

[13] However, in rare cases, it is possible for Bible translators to be forced to adopt a theological position contrary to their own in translating the Bible in a certain way, such as the illustration given earlier about a Lutheran employed to translate the Bible for a Methodist Bible Society.

[14] Baker (2006) remains the most detailed exposition of this concept in the field of translation studies to date (2018:179). Also see Jones (2020).

world" (2018:180), or as "the primary means by which we make sense of the world around us" (2020:357; Somers and Gibson 1994:58). In this sociological sense, a narrative is akin to theology, for theology can also be seen as a grand narrative, that is, a story about God and his creation, through which one can make sense of the world. Baker actually cites Christianity and other world religions as examples of "meta-narratives," which she defines as "particularly potent public narratives that persist over long periods of time and influence the lives of people across a wide range of settings" (2018:185; 2010:351).

Baker's understanding here is remarkably similar to what is called narrative theology (also known as postliberal theology), the theological movement started by Hans Frei and George Lindbeck in the 1980s, which similarly considers theology as a grand narrative instead of a system of propositions, thus demonstrating the affinity between theology and narrative.[15] There are at least two ways this concept of narrative is useful to studying theological influence in Bible translation. First, this sociological understanding of narrative, especially on the level of what Baker called meta-narrative, is very close to the term "worldview," which can be defined as "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint"[16] or "a set of fundamental beliefs, values, etc., determining or constituting a comprehensive outlook on the world; a perspective on life."[17] In this sense, both "narrative" and "worldview" are the "story" which people believe to be true and through which they understand the world. Thus, theology has also often been described as a worldview,[18] for theology by definition offers people a view on God and his relationship with the world, through which man may make sense of the world and his own existence in it. Thus, theology, taken in this sense, can certainly be considered as a worldview, and conversely, every worldview, if it is to account for the world, must also have a theological dimension, i.e., saying something about God, including saying that God does not exist or that the question about

[15] For an introduction to narrative theology, see Hauerwas and Jones (1997).

[16] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/worldview.

[17] https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230262#eid13857122. For a thorough study on the concept of worldview, see Sire 2015.

[18] For example, Randy Alcorn wrote: "Though worldview and theology can be distinguished from each other in secondary ways, in the primary sense, I think they are not only inseparable, but practically synonymous... 'Worldview' is a modern word, but it is not a modern concept. It used to be called doctrine or theology. One looked at the world through the lenses of one's theology, and that was his worldview...In my mind, theology is the foundation upon which worldview is built." https://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Feb/9/what-relationship-between-theology-and-worldview/, accessed March 30, 2022.

God is unknowable.[19] This insight shows that theology and meta-narrative as a kind of worldview are simply inseparable. In this light, if we apply Baker's socio-narrative theory, particularly the idea that every translator is inevitably part of a narrative—whether consciously or unconsciously (Baker 2005:11–12)[20]—then it follows that every translator is also inevitably part of a meta-narrative with a theological dimension. In other words, if Baker is correct that no one is without a narrative, then no one is without a theology through which one may answer any question about God—which is actually a common view shared by theologians. This shows how the concept of narrative may illuminate the intersection between theology and translation and can be a useful concept to describe and explain theological influence in Bible translation. For example, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or Eastern Orthodox theology can all be understood as different kinds of meta-narratives and studied to see how out of the influences of these meta-narratives Bible translations were produced differently.

Another way that the concept of narrative can be helpful to studying theological influence in Bible translation is in the typology of narratives as defined by Baker in her works (2015; 2006). According to Baker, narratives can be divided into four categories: besides meta-narratives, there are also personal, public, and disciplinary narratives. Personal narratives are "narratives of individuals, who are normally located at the centre of narration"; public narratives are "elaborated by and circulate among social and institutional formations larger than the individual"; and disciplinary narratives "have at their centre the object of enquiry in a scholarly field" (2010:350–351). Boéri (2008:26) introduced an additional category, professional narratives, to cover "stories and explanations that professionals elaborate for themselves and others about the nature and ethos of their activity."

[19] As Freddy Davis wrote: "[E]very worldview has some understanding about God—even if it is to deny his existence. And make no mistake, denying the existence of God is as much a faith statement as advocating for his existence. Thus, every worldview has a theological point of view. Understanding the place of theology is a critical piece in understanding any belief system." http://www.marketfaith.org/worldview-and-theology/ (accessed March 30, 2022).

[20] Baker (2005:11–12) wrote, "A narrative view helps us understand that people's behavior is ultimately guided by the stories they believe about the events in which they are embedded...Moreover, narrative theory does not allow for 'space in between': no one, translators included, can stand outside or between narratives." Elsewhere she wrote, "Just as a culture-less or context-free entity or event is impossible to envision, so an element that is not configured in narrative form is by (my) definition of narrative unimaginable and/or incomprehensible to the human mind" (Baker and Chesterman 2008:24).

All these five types of narratives can be applied to theology, for it can equally be said that there is personal theology as one's own account of his or her own relationship or "story" with God; public theology as a social and institutional entity's own account of its own relationship or story with God; disciplinary theology as theology taught and studied in academia; meta theology as a grand theological narrative about God's plan for the whole universe; and professional theology as the theology that professional theologians and clergymen develop for themselves and others to explain about the nature, ethos, importance, and purpose of their activities. In short, theology can be divided into and found on all five levels, and these different levels of theologies can all be studied to see how they interact and influence Bible translation. This provides a useful theoretical framework for describing theological influence in Bible translation and also shows how complex and ubiquitous theological influence could be in shaping Bible translation.

3.3 Constraints and *Skopos* theory

Andrew Lefevere's model of describing translation as rewriting under the constraints of patronage, ideology, poetics, universe of discourse, and language (Lefevere 1992) also provides a useful framework for analyzing theological influence: patronage corresponding to the particular sponsors with their own theological traditions that support Bible translation activities, ideology corresponding to the theology of the translators and other stakeholders, poetics (similar to norms) corresponding to the customs or traditions of how Bible translation should be in a certain historical context, and the universe of discourse corresponding to the larger context of the entire fields of Bible translation and theology at a certain time and place. These concepts may serve as supplementary conceptual tools for describing theological influence in Bible translation. Lefevere's insight that "on every level of the translation process it can be shown that if linguistic considerations conflict with considerations of an ideological and/or poetiological nature, the latter considerations tend to win" corresponds to and confirms the idea that theological norms tend to prevail over other kinds of norms, because they embody the ultimate value of being "true according to God" as discussed above, which to Bible translators and their patrons are usually the most important value above all.

Skopos theory (Reiß and Vermeer 2014; Nord 2018), where *skopos* is defined as "purpose" in translational activity, may also be applied at least in two ways to the study of theological influence in Bible translation. First, despite the criticism the theory has received, i.e., for lacking empirical support and testable hypotheses (Chesterman 2017; Martín de León 2020:201), it nevertheless points to the goal-oriented or functional nature of Bible translation, showing that no

Bible translation is done without a certain goal or function in view[21] which guides the entire translation process. Since the ultimate goal of most Bible translations is inherently theological, i.e., to convey the Word of God to a certain readership, the theological backgrounds and context of those who get to decide any other sub-goals of a Bible translation will inevitably influence how these other goals are formulated, negotiated, and executed in relation to the ultimate goal. For example, the conviction that there should or should not be different Bible versions for different age groups, social groups, or gender groups is underpinned by a certain theological view. As the goals for Bible translation projects are often manifold and even conflicting (Wilt 2014:59–66; Wilt and Wendland 2008:178–189), a study of the theological considerations and presuppositions behind the formulation, negotiation, and execution of all the goals in a Bible translation project will certainly be illuminating.

Second, the "*skopos* rule" in *Skopos* theory states that "translational action is a function of its *skopos*" (Martín de León 2020:200), or "the *skopos* is the highest determining factor influencing the translator's decisions" (Chesterman 2017:56). Even if this "*skopos* rule" is only partially true, it still serves to show the paramount importance of studying theological influence in Bible translation because what the *skopos* or function of the Bible should be, as discussed above, is inherently a theological question, and consequently, theological considerations and presuppositions which contribute to the answering of that question may prove to be the highest determining factor influencing the translator's decisions.[22]

4 Useful theoretical concepts in Biblical translation studies

Two other useful theoretical concepts are found in the field of Biblical translation studies, namely, the concept of "contextual frame of reference" developed by Wendland (2008), and the Bible translation polysystem theory proposed by Kerr (2013).

[21] Even if a person is to translate the Bible just for himself and not for anyone else, that intention is still a goal or *skopos* which will influence how that entire translational activity is carried out.

[22] It should be noted that determining the primary *skopos* is just part of a project's overall brief, or job commission, but the rest of the brief is certainly under the influence of the primary *skopos* or sets of *skopoi*.

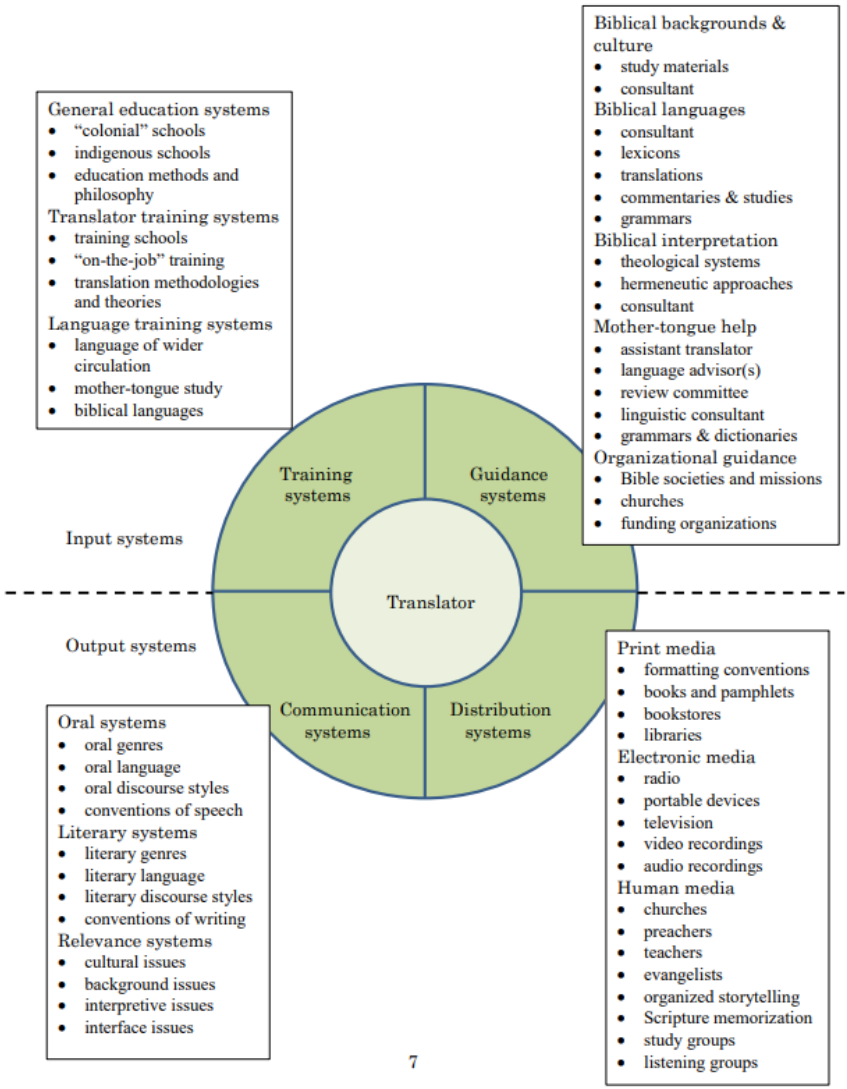
4.1 Contextual frame of reference

In Wendland's theoretical framework, a contextual "frame of reference" is defined as "a particular perspective from which the universe is observed" (2008:2), "a psychological construct, or mental model, which furnishes one with prevailing point of view that manipulates prominence and relevance to influence thinking and, if need be, judgement as well" (2010:28). A frame may also be viewed as "a cognitive schema involving a grouping, or file, of interrelated signs (in a semiotic sense) that guides a strategy of perception and interpretation which people rely on to understand and respond to the world around them" (28).

For our purpose here, it suffices to point out that the usefulness of Wendland's model is in its division of the very broad idea of contextual frame of reference into layers of subordinate frames, from the most inclusive and generic ("outer") one to the less inclusive and more specific and concrete ones, that is, from cognitive frames to sociocultural frames, organizational frames, situational frames, and textual frames (which is further divided into intertextual and intratextual frames). As in the case of "narrative" where theology can be categorized according to all five levels of narrative (i.e., meta, public, disciplinary, professional, and personal narrative/theology), so can theology be categorized according to these different layers of frame—as theology with respect to the cognitive, sociocultural, organizational, situational, and textual and intratextual layers. Among them, cognitive frames is the most general and inclusive frame encompassing all other sub-frames just mentioned. It is commonly termed "worldview" as "an individual or a corporate conception of knowledge, being, and existence—in short, all of 'reality'" (2008:19). As such, the cognitive frame of reference corresponds to Baker's idea of meta-narrative and to theology as a kind of meta-narrative, and can serve as a useful conceptual tool to describe how theological beliefs within a particular culture, whether Christian or non-Christian, may function as a cognitive frame of reference which encompasses and influences all other sub-frames—the sociocultural, organizational, situational, and textual frames. In Wendland's usage, sociocultural frames mainly refer to the constraint of particular socio-cultural customs or traditions; organizational frames, to the rights and responsibility of allegiance to the specific organizations within a society, including church bodies and denominations; situational frames, to the circumstances in which different acts of religious or secular communication takes place; textual frames, to the pervasive influence of biblical intertextuality and an individual text's internal frame of reference (2008). Like the different narratives, all these different mental frames of reference provide a useful theoretical framework for theological influence in Bible translation to be explored and described in different cognitive layers as distinct contextual dimensions (2).

4.2 Bible translation polysystem theory

Applying the polysystem translation theory by Itamar Even-Zohar and Toury, Kerr proposed a "Bible translation polysystem theory," which he considered as "a more holistic approach to describe the entire picture of Bible translation and how individual changes in a translation process may affect other parts" (Kerr 2013:1). His theoretical model is based on the premise that "Bible translation is the end result of the specific combination of systems and sub-systems used to produce it" (18); thus, his model is "a mapping of Bible translation polysystems, defining them into broad categories of input systems (training and guidance systems) and output systems (communication and distribution systems)" (1), as represented by the following diagram from Kerr (2013:7):



The usefulness of this model and diagram to studying theological influence in Bible translation is that it lays out almost the entire process of Bible translation and allows us to easily identify where theological influence may have played a role in it. One limitation of this diagram is that it leaves out theological

education and training within the "Training systems"[23] and also does not explicitly spell out any theological factors in the entire output systems. However, these aspects could have been mentioned in the "background issues" and "interpretive issues" under "Relevance systems" and also with reference to theological backgrounds of the target readers, which is not even listed. Nevertheless, this diagram does show that theology plays a major role in the input systems, particularly in the "Guidance systems" where interpretative and translational decisions are made and are influenced by "Biblical interpretation" including "theological systems." "Organizational guidance" particularly from Bible societies and churches are most likely under the influence of the theological traditions associated with those organizations. The theological traditions from which the consultants and study materials come will likely also influence the translation process. While more detailed items can be added to this diagram with theological factors spelled out more clearly, this diagram and the Bible translation polysystem theory proposed by Kerr provides yet another useful theoretical framework for studying theological influence in Bible translation. Particularly, combining his theory (which deals more with the extrinsic, outward structures or systems associated with Bible translation) with Wendland's frame of reference model (which deals more with the intrinsic, inward mental construct) will likely yield a very comprehensive picture of the entire process of Bible translation, where theological influences can be systematically located and studied. If Bible translation is a cube, Kerr's model could be said to have mapped out nearly all the surfaces of this cube (all the possible areas involved in Bible translation), while Wendland's model could be said to have provided an "X-ray view" that looks inside this cube, to reveal the multiple layers of cognitive frames in each area. Thus, in the four areas that Kerr identified (the training systems, guidance systems, communication systems, and distribution systems), the different layers of cognitive frames that Wendland listed could all be examined, and this methodology should help the researchers, on the one hand, identify the areas and cognitive layers to look for theological influences (for theological influences may operate in all of them) and, on the other hand, avoid losing sight of the breadth and depth of non-theological influences (which may also operate in all these areas and cognitive layers), to attain a fuller understanding of the complex dynamics of both theological and non-theological influences that shape a Bible translation.

[23] Kerr (personal correspondence) agrees that theological education and training might be included within the "Training systems."

5 Summary

This article points out that theological influence in Bible translation has been mostly perceived negatively by Bible translation scholars, and this negative attitude might partly explain why no systematic theoretical framework has been proposed by scholars for the study of this phenomenon. However, there are a number of existing theories or theoretical concepts in both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies that may provide a useful theoretical framework for studying theological influence in Bible translation. These are the concepts of norms (Toury and Chesterman), narrative (Baker), constraints (Lefevere), "*Skopos*" (Nord), "contextual frame of reference" (Wendland), and Bible translation polysystem theory (Kerr). While none of these theoretical frameworks, when considered separately, can perfectly or completely describe the phenomenon of theological influence in Bible translation, when put together they do provide a comprehensive set of theoretical "tool kits" for describing the various facets of theological influence in Bible translation. With these five theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools at our disposal, it is possible for the multifaceted theological influence involved in Bible translation to be studied and described in a more objective and systematic way in order to achieve a greater awareness and understanding of their profound and consequential interrelationships.

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