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## Exploring the Theory and Practice of Modern Bible Translating: A Selective Overview

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a selective overview of what may be termed “*biblical* translation studies” from a practitioner’s perspective. The survey begins with a short description of some of the principal types, or styles, of contemporary translation as expressed by leaders in the field, which is a creative art form as well as an experience-based craft. Next, the practice of translation is defined and a method of applying it is described with special reference to a “literary functional equivalence” (*LiFE*) version along with the main media whereby it may be communicated. The various factors involved in establishing an effective translation project are considered in terms of a particular audience-related purpose, or *skopos*, and from the perspective of a frames of reference model. This is illustrated by several examples from Chichewa, a southeast Africa Bantu language of wider communication. In conclusion, the salient ideas of this study are summarized by suggesting how the different aspects of contemporary Bible translating may be applied by readers in their own lives and professional practice.

**Key Words:** Translation Studies, Bible Translation, Translation Theory and Practice, Chichewa

### Introduction

In many of the major languages of the world, a new translation of the “Holy Bible,” usually the Old as well as the New Testaments together, appears almost on an annual basis. But readers often do not know the difference between older versions and the newer ones being published, or more importantly, which text might best serve their personal needs in a given setting of use. In the following survey of the field of contemporary Bible translating (the *process*) and translations (the *products*), I will focus on some major areas of possible interest and importance based on my experience as a former United Bible Societies’ translation consultant and trainer in Africa. These concern: (1) the principal theories about, which may in effect represent different approaches to, the practice of translating; (2) a detailed definition of “translation” and (3) how to apply this in the preparation of a “literary functional equivalence” (*LiFE*) version; (4) the chief media, or modes of communicating a translated text today; (5) an overview of the broad continuum of translation styles that are currently on offer; (6) several examples of functionally-based versions in Chichewa along with the contextual frames of reference that characterized their composition; and (7) in conclusion, several hopefully helpful suggestions regarding how the preceding discussion might be applied practically as one confronts the diverse options that are available to contemporary consumers of Scripture in many, but not all, parts of the world.

## 1. Theories of Translation

I am using the term “theory” in particular to refer to the different strategies that are common in the contemporary field of “translation studies” (TS).<sup>1</sup> This includes Bible translation as an important, but often overlooked, subcategory of TS, except for a few pioneering texts, like Nida & Taber (1969) and E-A. Gutt (1991).<sup>2</sup> In the present section, I will simply list and briefly characterize several of the better-known approaches, based on my fuller presentation in *Translating the Literature of Scripture* (2004:ch. 2, see also Wendland 2018; Barnwell 2022; Beekman and Callow 1978):

### 1.1 Literalist

The practitioner of a literalist, or formal correspondence, approach to translation makes a diligent attempt to reflect the overt linguistic features, or written style, of the original text in the language of translation—that is, “in English dress but with a Hebraic voice” (Everett Fox 1995:ix). The word “voice” in this quotation is important because this method typically emphasizes the spoken word of the source text (ST), especially in its assumed original setting of communication and occasionally also in the corresponding contemporary context (e.g., Robert Alter 2018). As Fox (1995:ix–x) notes:

This translation is guided by the principle that the Hebrew Bible, like much of the literature of antiquity, was meant to be read aloud, and that consequently it must be translated with careful attention to rhythm and sound. The translation therefore tries to mimic the particular rhetoric of the Hebrew whenever possible, preserving such devices as repetition, allusion, alliteration, and wordplay. It is intended to echo the Hebrew, and to lead the reader back to the sound structure and form of the original.

The problem is that any attempt “to echo the Hebrew” in translation will inevitably distort the form of the original message in another language to a greater or lesser extent.

### 1.2 Functionalist

It should be noted that a fully functional approach to translation was being promoted and applied in the discipline for some years before the appearance of de Waard and Nida’s 1986 expanded popularization of this method for Bible translators. This was a prominent aspect of the German *Skopostheorie* school of translation pioneered by K. Reiss and H. Vermeer in the early 1980s (see Reiss 2000) and further developed later in the writings of Christiane Nord (1997 being one prominent example). Functionalist writers naturally stress the primary communicative purpose (or *skopos*) that a particular translation is designed to perform for its designated target audience within their specific sociocultural setting.<sup>3</sup> I will refer again to some prominent aspects of the functionalist agenda when defining “translation” below and then later again when presenting some examples in Chichewa.

<sup>1</sup> The term “theory” may be defined with regard to both *content* and *practice*, for example: “a coherent group of tested general propositions, commonly regarded as correct, that can be used as principles of explanation and prediction for a class of phenomena, *Einstein’s theory of relativity*” versus “a particular conception or view of something to be done or of the method of doing it; a system of rules or principles, *conflicting theories of how children best learn to read*” (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/theory>).

<sup>2</sup> The specific sub-field of “biblical” translation studies may be dated back to 1964 and the publication of Eugene A. Nida’s foundational work, *Toward a Science of Translating*. The early pioneers and translation agencies that carried the work forward by leaps and bounds are documented in the essential reference work by Noss and Hauser, *A Guide to Bible Translation* (2020; see also Lovelace 2022). It is a pity that their contributions to the wider discipline often go unrecognized in secular TS publications.

<sup>3</sup> Some theorists prefer “the older term *receptor language* for *target language* as a less belligerent metaphor for language transposition” (Barnstone 1993:228, original italics), but since the latter term is in common TS usage, I will retain it.

### 1.3 Descriptive

A school of thought called “descriptive translation studies” (DTS) was originated by Gideon Toury in the early 1980s more or less in opposition to what its promoters viewed as the prevailing “prescriptive” approach to translation practice (Toury 1995). This group of largely literary scholars rejected “the idea that the study of translation should be geared primarily to formulating rules, norms or guidelines for the practice or evaluation of translation or to developing didactic instruments for translator training” (Hermans 1999:7). DTS theorists ... are thus largely “product,” rather than “process,” oriented in their perspective (Gaddis-Rose 1997:9). Their focus tends towards pure empirical research, which has a threefold emphasis—the documentation, explanation, and prediction of all types of translation-related phenomena, including the psychological activity itself (i.e., how translators think during their work). A major goal is to describe how translations operate according to general situational “norms” in the wider context of a given society and more specifically within the framework of a national literary system.

### 1.4 Text-Linguistic

The text-linguistic approach is best represented by Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, whose theoretical studies and publications (1990, 1997, 2020) provide many examples of how this detailed sociolinguistic, *discourse-focused* methodology can assist translators in their efforts towards interlingual text-transformation. Their multifaceted analyses are of particular importance to those who are seeking to render original works according to their genre—from newspaper articles to scientific studies to creative literature. With reference to the literary works, they call attention to the difficulties that translators typically face when dealing with texts that are stylistically more vibrant, or “turbulent,” in nature. Such dynamic oral or written discourse consists of a higher incidence of novel or unexpected and unpredictable, “rhetorically marked,” forms. It also features “the use of language that essentially involves a motivated deviation from some norm,” which therefore needs to be reproduced through some linguistic means in translation (1997:216).

### 1.5 Relevance-based

The insights of Relevance Theory are important to Bible translation, as has been pointed out by quite a few contemporary commentators and critics. Its theoretical foundation may be summarized as follows:

The central claim of relevance theory is that human communication crucially creates an expectation of *optimal relevance*, that is, an expectation on the part of the hearer that his (or her) attempt at interpretation will yield *adequate contextual effects at minimal processing cost*. (E-A Gutt 1991:20)

This cognitive oriented “minimax principle” offers a handy heuristic procedure when assessing effective verbal communication, especially with respect to information that is contextually implicit. Normally, sincere speakers do try to convey what they have to say in a way that is easiest for their hearers to understand (requiring low processing effort), yet also with a certain degree of communicative impact and appeal (resulting in high cognitive, emotive, volitional effects). Whether this convenient dictum is always true or not is debatable since it cannot be empirically tested (Fawcett 1997:137). In any case, a general interest in “relevance” (e.g., appropriateness, applicability) with respect to a

selected target audience certainly concerns communication via translation.<sup>4</sup> This could be on the general level of *policy*, e.g., when formulating a project job commission, or more specifically with regard to actual Bible translation principles and procedures, e.g., how to handle metaphor in a particular passage or throughout a rendering of the epistle to Titus (e.g., Smith 2000).

### 1.6 Interpretive

The interpretive method (e.g., Delisle 1988) is not often mentioned in recent overviews and anthologies that pertain to the field of translating. Indeed, Jan Sterk (2001:3, fn. 4) asks, “Has this school and its insightful approach to translation been overlooked by the English-speaking linguistic translation community?” In essence, the approach may be summarized as follows:

The interpretative theory, ... holds that the process [of translation] consists in understanding the original text by deverbalising its linguistic form, and in re-expressing in another language the ideas that were understood and the feelings that were felt.... Crucial in [this] approach, therefore, is the finding that at a certain point in the understanding process [i.e., prior to translating], contact with the physical wording of the source text is abandoned and ideas take over. In text-to-text translation, the ideas (or the intent of the author...) that were abstracted from the words of the source text through the deverbalisation process, are re-expressed through the words of the target language (ibid.:3–4).

This summary thus describes hypothetically what happens in the mind of many literary translators and seems, in fact, to approximate the familiar “dynamic equivalence” method proposed by Nida & Taber (1969:33–34).

### 1.7 Comparative

The comparative approach to literary translation is less systematic in theoretical terms and correspondingly more ad hoc in its practical application than the theories described above. It differs from the DTS method (see 1.3) in that, along with being comparative (using the standard techniques of literary criticism), it tends to be more evaluative and esoteric in nature. It also devotes considerable attention to intercultural issues and influences (similarities or differences) as reflected in the creative activity of translating. According to Marilyn Gaddis-Rose (1997:88, 90) the general aim of a comparative approach is a “stereoscopic reading” that utilizes “both the original language text and one (or more) translations,” whether literal or free in style. This apparently refers to the adoption of a philosophically neutral point of view that putatively exists between two different languages and cultures. The goal of this rather abstract relational procedure from the secular viewpoint of comparative literature is to open up a conceptual space, “a circumference of interpretation” (ibid.:55), in order “to show how translating and translations make the reading of literary texts richer” (ibid.:75), that is, more dense, complex, problematic or challenging, and thought-provoking (cf. Wright 2016:60).

### 1.8 Professional

A final, distinct yet important perspective on literary translation, in particular, is that of hands-on professional practitioners—those who actually translate, edit, and critique the contemporary translations of secular literature. It is indeed helpful to read what they have to say on the subject since they are both author and audience-centered in their approach. After all, they must produce ostensibly

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<sup>4</sup> Relevance was listed as one of four essential “conversational maxims” by philosopher H. Paul Grice in his seminal article “Logic and Conversation” (1975; Nordquist 2019).

“faithful” translations that sell, or are at least well received by their critics. “The goal of literary translation is publication” (Landers 2001:ix).

So how does this strongly goal-oriented viewpoint and purpose affect their translation practice in terms of principles and procedures? Landers states his guiding principle for literary translation in recognizable Nidan terms as follows: “...all facets of the work, ideally, are reproduced in such a manner as to create in the TL reader the same emotional and psychological effect experienced by the *original* SL reader” (2001:27; cf. Nida and Taber 1969:1). Landers claims that this is “the prevailing view among most, though not all, literary translators” and further that “most translators judge the success of a translation largely on the degree to which it ‘doesn’t read like a translation.’ The object is to render Language A into Language B in a way that leaves as little evidence as possible of the process” (ibid.:49).

Such an opinion differs markedly from that of many modern translation theorists and academic critics, who “work a different side of the street” (ibid.:49). After all, “... who other than scholars would want to read prose [or poetry] that bears the heavy imprint of foreign grammar, idiom, or style?” (ibid.:50).<sup>5</sup> In short, most professional literary translators would claim that one must be an artist in order to “perform” verbally as an artist when carrying out their work (e.g., Wechsler 1998).

## 1.9 Summary

When comparatively evaluating the preceding overview, we note, first of all, the distinctive differences in motive and focus that characterize the representatives of these diverse translation methodologies. These range from the primarily author-oriented approaches (e.g., interpretive) to those with a target-audience perspective (relevance theory, functionalist). Then there are the contrasting tactics that concern their manner of dealing with a SL text, whether in a formally correspondent manner versus idiomatic, or somewhere in-between. These disparate perspectives are accompanied by varied emphases on certain communicative functions, either to the exclusion or the enhancement of others, for example, a *literalistic* focus and a *liturgical* function in contrast to an *artistic* focus and a *poetic* function for a hymned version of the Psalter.<sup>6</sup> Bible translation theorists and practitioners can learn something from all these approaches, depending on the chief purpose, or *skopos*, that has been adopted for a particular project. However, the text-linguistic, functionalist, and relevance-related methods appear to offer the most useful insights and assistance for those who wish to produce a meaning-based version. This leads us to a consideration of the activity of translation and how to define it.

## 2. A Definition of Translation

According to the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, there are just two basic methods of translating: “Either the translator moves the reader to the author, or the translator moves the author to the reader” (Lindemann 2016:16). While this concise saying is generally true, the actual performance of translating is quite a bit more complicated than that, as those who have already tried it might well attest. In this section, we will explore the subject in somewhat greater detail from the perspective of Bible translation, starting from a factored description of what this complex activity of text analysis and recreation involves.

<sup>5</sup> “[O]verly zealous applications of theoretical guides can wreak havoc with a translation,” for example, “the doctrine known as ‘resistance,’ whose best known advocate is Lawrence Venuti” (Landers 2001:50; cf. Berman 2004:280). “I ... have yet to meet a working translator who places theory above experience, flexibility, a sense of style, and an appreciation for nuance” (ibid.:49-50).

<sup>6</sup> Both styles are musically well exemplified in the recent Lutheran publication *Christian Worship: Psalter* (2023).

I view the process of “translating” (the practice) and “translation” (the product) in a way that seeks to respect the original author along with the source text, the target language, the medium of transmission, *and* the envisaged audience by subdividing it into a progression of integrated and overlapping factors, as follows (Wendland 2018:20-21):

*Translation* is a complex act of communication involving:

- (a) the conceptually mediated, verbal re-composition of
- (b) one contextually framed, inferentially interpreted source text
- (c) within a different cognitive and communicative setting
- (d) in the most relevant,
- (e) functionally equivalent manner possible,
- (f) that is, stylistically marked, more or less,
- (g) in keeping with the designated job commission
- (h) that has been communally agreed upon for the target-language project concerned.

The sequence of these core constituents may be conceptually unpacked and explained as follows, with special reference now to a “literary” version (the components above are italicised in the definitional statements below):

Within this *conceptually mediated re-composition* process, the translator (or, ideally, a team) acts as a “mediator,” or verbal “foreign-exchange broker,” who must fairly represent all their “clients,” that is, the original author and his/her inferred communicative intentions as well as the expressed needs and desires of the target-language audience.

- a) Concerning the *contextually framed, inferentially interpreted text*: “Context” refers to the total mental frame of reference—that is, the complete “cognitive environment”<sup>7</sup>—which influences and inferentially guides the perception, interpretation, and application of a given source text.
- b) Within a *different cognitive and communicative setting*: The translator conceptually negotiates a re-formulation, that is, a verbal re-signification, of the original text within a new language, worldview, and sociocultural situation via a specific medium of transmission.
- c) In the *most relevant*: The aim is to convey the greatest number of beneficial cognitive, emotive, and volitional effects for readers (and/or hearers), albeit without their having to expend excessive or extraneous processing effort.
- d) And most *functionally equivalent* manner possible: The target version, accompanied whenever possible by a supplemental paratext, should exhibit a demonstratable and acceptable degree of similarity, or correspondence, to the original text in terms of the

<sup>7</sup> By “cognitive environment” is meant “The set of all facts that are manifest to an individual. This comprises everything they can perceive, remember or infer, including the facts they are not currently aware of” ([https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Relevance\\_theory](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Relevance_theory)).



diverse meaning variables of semantic content, pragmatic intent, connotative resonance, emotive impact, artistic appeal, auditory effect, and/or rhetorical power in accordance with the chosen literary genre.<sup>8</sup>

- e) *Stylistically marked*, more or less: The degree of stylistic *domestication* (i.e., reflecting the “genius” of the TL) versus the amount of *foreignness* (reflecting the “otherness” of the SL text) (Venuti 1994:ch. 1) must always be assessed with respect to the linguistic and literary norms, conventions, desires, and expectations of the TL audience.
- f) In keeping with the *designated job commission*: A TL text’s level of accuracy and acceptability is defined with respect to the translation project’s *brief*, or job description, which includes its guiding terms of reference, primary communication goal(s), or desired *skopos*, staff experience and training, administrative and management procedures, the available funding and other resources, quality-control measures, community wishes and requirements, proposed time-line, and desired completion schedule.
- g) *Agreed upon by the TL community*: The overall communicative framework of the TL social and religious setting is determinative for establishing the project’s job commission. This needs to be first accurately researched, discussed, then agreed upon by all major sponsors and supporters, and, finally, closely monitored, evaluated, and, if necessary, revised on a systematic, ongoing basis until the task has been successfully completed (including the text’s pre-publication, audience-readership testing program).

It is important to note that translation differs from monolingual communication since it involves at least *two* different languages, contextual settings, and interpersonal situations—often even *three* (i.e., a version derived also from some *medial* translation in another language, like English, if the TL translators cannot access the biblical SL text). The formal linguistic and conceptual distance between these two (or three) contexts is variable, depending on the languages and cultures concerned. Generally speaking, the greater the cognitive divergence—that is, from an ancient Near Eastern setting—the more difficult the Bible translation task becomes and the more dynamic form-oriented mediation on the part of the translator is required if a meaningful, let alone a literary, version is to be prepared.

It should also be pointed out that in certain cases, several of the components listed above may stand in conflict with one another, thus necessitating some degree or manner of compromise in practice. This applies in particular to features (e) and (f). For example, if the target community (h) decides that they would prefer a more traditional, “formal correspondence” (FC) version to serve their envisioned purposes (g), e.g., a “church Bible,” then the amount of TL-oriented “stylistic marking” (f) as well as the amount of “functional equivalence” (FE) in the language and text of the translation (e) will turn out to be considerably less.

Why is it important to carefully define what one means by “translation”? The purpose is to avoid the misunderstanding that can arise if a particular version is mis-labeled or incorrectly defined. For example, the following is a quotation from the popular Logos.com website (current as of 16/02/23). I have added words in brackets for greater contextual sense and italicized certain debatable assertions:

<sup>8</sup> In the case of a more literal version, the *paratext*, e.g., study notes, will tend to focus on helping to convey the intended meaning of the biblical text. In the case of an idiomatic version, on the other hand, such notes may be needed to point out important aspects of the original form that have been lost or left implicit in translation. A “literary” version is one that utilizes the full linguistic and stylistic resources of the TL.



Bible Translating has a spectrum of target equivalence approaches ranging from formal to functional, with dynamic in between. Formal seeks [a] literal rendering of [the] original language [in the] target language, which wants to preserve original word order as much as practical. Also [the] literal *goal is one translated word for one original word*. This translation philosophy assumes that the reader is familiar with the [language and] culture of the original text.

In contrast, functional equivalence focuses on phrasing meaning using contemporary colloquialism. Here the assumption is that the reader is not familiar with the original culture but must have the cultural meaning translated. In a sense, *functional equivalence is an application commentary of the original text. In the middle of the spectrum is [a] dynamic thought for thought [version]*, which seeks a mediating balance from stilted literal expression and current colloquialism. ([https://wiki.logos.com/Bible Translation Spectrum](https://wiki.logos.com/Bible_Translation_Spectrum))

Which assertions are correct in the preceding description of “Bible translating” and seem to reflect an accurate perspective? On the other hand, what information is wrong as stated in the quotation—that is, according to most current academic publications and discussions on the subject (e.g., Noss 2007, Noss and Hauser 2020)? Indeed, it is quite accurate to say that Bible translating and the translations that are produced offer the public a broad range of choices in most major languages. We will be exploring this continuum of translation possibilities in greater detail in section, 4 below.

But it is also necessary to point out what is incorrect about the statement above, which has been posted on the influential *Logos* website. To begin with, it is erroneous to assert that literal, or formal correspondence, versions seek to achieve the goal of “*one translated word for one original word*.” This would result in an interlinear gloss rendition, suitable only for specialised scholarly purposes.

Then to be more specific and somewhat technical, the usage of both “functional” and “dynamic” equivalence in the preceding quotation has been rather muddled and misapplied. Thus, what Eugene Nida termed “dynamic equivalence” back in 1969, was deliberately rebranded with significant improvements in his book on “functional equivalence” in 1986.

Furthermore, one must more critically and precisely label as a “paraphrase” any type of rendering that employs so-called “contemporary colloquialisms” in “an application commentary of the original text,” for example, Eugene Petersen’s *The Message* or Ecclesia’s *The Voice Bible* in English.

### 3. The Practice of Translation

How, then, does one go about preparing a translation of Scripture? While keeping the preceding comprehensive, but more technical description generally in mind, it would be helpful to simplify its complexity by breaking the process down to the lowest common denominator. This consists of a pair of basic and closely interrelated questions that will lead one towards determining “what kind of” translation is needed—often technically termed, the *skopos*-goal for the project as a whole.

First of all, “for whom” is the translation intended—what or who constitutes the primary target audience?<sup>9</sup> In practice, this question is not always so easy to answer, especially within larger, demographically mixed language communities that already have several published Bible versions readily available. Furthermore, as noted above, this question cannot be answered credibly if sufficient and detailed consumer research has not been conducted on an unbiased basis among the probable reception groups within the entire target language (TL) community. Is there a special focus on, for example, the older

<sup>9</sup> This fundamental question goes back to the classic study by Nida and Taber 1969:1.

*or* younger generation; all Christians *or* a particular segment of the faith (e.g., Catholic/Protestant); specifically Christians *or* all people of the language group; only first-language speakers *or* all speakers of the language?

The second, and necessarily sequential question is this: “for what purpose” is the translation intended? Here again, there are a wide range of possibilities that need to be specified during pre-project research among the primary target group(s), for example, a liturgical Bible for public worship, which may necessitate a more formal type of rendering. On the other hand, if people want a more meaning-oriented, common-language version to supplement an older, familiar but unidiomatic translation—say, for the purpose of personal study—then their *skopos* would specify a functionally-equivalent translation. Obviously, there are many parameters of aspiration and proposed usage that might enter into the final decision, e.g., a narrower TL group (women, youth, non-Christians, second-language speakers) or desired setting of use (for Bible class, an oral-aural, dramatic presentation, musical/song text, etc.).

The following is a sample set of translation techniques that may be applied, with or without adaptation, during the production of a specific, “*literary functional equivalence*” (*LiFE*) type of version (abstracted from Wendland 2004:chs. 7-8 and Wendland 201:ch. 3). The first sequence of procedures applies to an analysis (exegesis) of the biblical SL document (cf. the alternative “guide” of Patton and Putnam 2019), while the next series of steps has reference to doing a corresponding examination of an accessible TL corpus or oral and written texts, an essential investigation that is often ignored, due either to the time factor or the lack of qualified researchers. The aim of this second set of guidelines is to identify and document the inventory of vernacular literary (oratorical) features that is available for possible use in such a *LiFE*-style translation.

#### *Literary-Structural Analysis Techniques*

- Step 1: Examine the complete textual, intertextual, and extratextual context.
- Step 2: Study the entire original text and determine its genre and subgenres.
- Step 3: Plot all occurrences of recursion/repetition in the pericope.
- Step 4: Find all instances of disjunction, or breaks, within the discourse.
- Step 5: Note the areas of special stylistic concentration.
- Step 6: Identify the major points of discourse demarcation and projection.
- Step 7: Outline the compositional structure of the entire pericope.
- Step 8: Prepare a complete semantic (word/symbol/motif) study.
- Step 9: Analyze any problematic linguistic and literary features.
- Step 10: Note the major speech functions and their interaction in the discourse.
- Step 11: Do a literary-structural comparison for possible form-functional matches.
- Step 12: Prepare a trial translation and test it in the TL community.

Following a thorough consideration of the biblical source text, a corresponding literary-structural collection, analysis, and categorization of TL oral and written art forms is necessary in the search for close linguistic matches or functional equivalents. The following steps are suggested (see also Wendland 1993):

#### *Determining the Stylistic and Structural features of TL Literature and/or Orature*

- Step 1: *Constitution* of a translation team qualified for this type of version

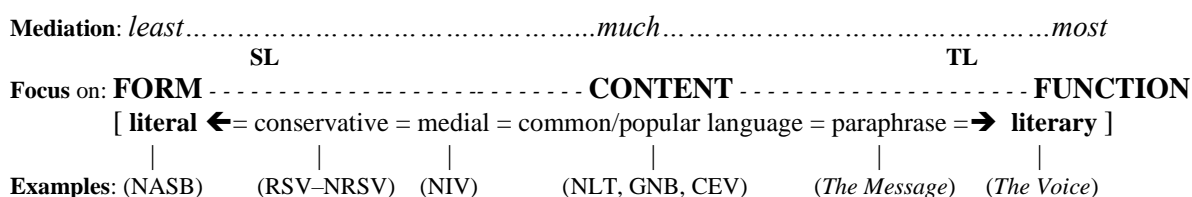
- Step 2: *Collection* of as many different TL genres as possible
- Step 3: *Classification* of all documented and designated stylistic features
- Step 4: *Comparison* with important biblical linguistic and literary features
- Step 5: *Compensation* measures determined for functional mis-matches or lack of ST forms
- Step 6: *Creation* of a well-composed draft translation in the TL
- Step 7: *Check-examination* of the draft version through community testing
- Step 8: *Criticism* by trained reviewers and SL/TL specialists, leading to revision
- Step 9: *Complementing* the written text by including performative oral-aural features

A literary-functional style of translation is just one of many options nowadays. In the next section, we will survey some of the other options, each of which is often motivated by a different communicative purpose and often supported by a particular ecclesiastical constituency.

## 4. A Continuum of Translations

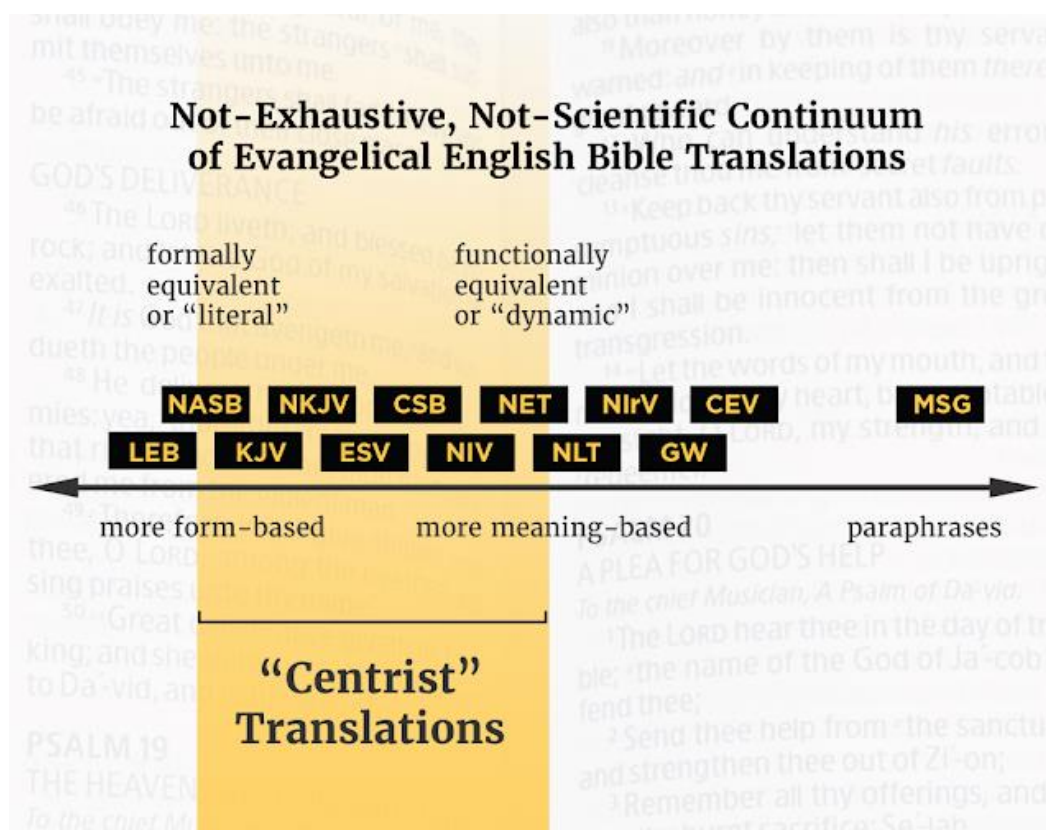
The result of the practice of translating over the years in the English language is a corpus of translations that differ according to *type* (whether more or less literal/natural in the TL) as well as to primary *target* group (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> language speakers) and communicative *tactic*, e.g., a specific denominational version, as distinct from a more general “common language” translation (Nida and Taber 1969:122). This continuum of possibilities may be represented in different ways, as shown in the two diagrams that follow.

The first illustration (Figure 1) is a simple representation of this hypothetical translation continuum, giving popular English versions that are examples of each type-stage. Also represented is the relative degree of mediation (linguistic intervention in the form of TL textual adjustment) that is required to produce the desired translation style. The figure is not intended to be a qualitative depiction, suggesting that type A is better than B, but is just a rough reflection of the amount of translational modification involved in the target language.



**Figure 1. Continuum of Bible translation styles—A**

The next diagram (Figure 2) is rather more detailed; it depicts the translation continuum in a more intricate manner and using a somewhat varied metalanguage, which leads to a further discussion of the need for precision in terminology.



(<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/search?q=A+Rising+Tide+Sinks+All+Boats> )

**Figure 2. Continuum of Bible translation styles—B**

The author of the preceding diagram of “centrist translations” comments at length below (Ward 2020:n.p., italics added):<sup>10</sup>

The “centrist” translations are the ones that go from about the NASB on the left to the NIV on the right. These are the translations that in my unscientific experience actually get used as the main translation in doctrinally sound evangelical churches. (I could be generous and include the NLT, too.)

Any further toward the left than the NASB and you cross into translations that are designed to be Bible study tools for those who know the original languages (the NASB itself is also often used this way). My own employer’s *Lexham English Bible*, born as a set of interlinear glosses, is an example. I see room for more translations that are hyper-literal like the LEB, because no one sees them as competing with the centrist ones to be used in churches. They are tools for study.

*Any further to the right than the NIV and you cross into translations that, for all their genuine usefulness, are generally perceived to do “too much interpreting” to be useful for all the varied needs of the average church.* Some people take what I’ve just said to be a criticism; I don’t. Not infrequently, I need the help the NLT’s—and even The Message’s—interpretation provides. These are useful Bible study tools, if you know what they’re aiming at. But careful preachers of the kind ETC [Evangelical Textual Criticism] serves have voted with their feet: they generally stick to the centrist translations unless

<sup>10</sup> For one attempt to rate English versions on the basis of relative “reading levels”, see the following site: (<https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2016/06/bible-translation-reading-levels/> ).

they are serving people without high school educations—which is precisely what I did very happily with the New International Reader’s Version (NIrV) for almost six years in a weekly outreach ministry.

Readers will not necessarily agree with the preceding personal reflections, for one reason or another. In any case, the *Logos* website post cited in 2.1 above continues with the following advice: “Comparing Bibles from across the spectrum of equivalent approaches can be insightful. Essentially all Bible translations are a commentary on the original text (within the bounds of a translator’s believability) so look for *commonality* (agreement) between apparently *different* renditions.”

However, in my Bible study I find it more helpful to reverse the final clause as follows: “so look for *divergence* (difference) between apparently *similar* renditions.” Why should this be the case? The point is to identify the main differences, analyze the nature of the disparity—whether of form or meaning—and then evaluate the result: If it is a matter of *form*, then which style of rendering, whether more or less literal/idiomatic, would be more suitable for a particular readership—or, indeed, an audience of listeners? If, on the other hand, there is a suspected difference in *content*, or where one’s interpretation of the content is debated, then the issue is much more serious and consequential since the essential meaning potential of the biblical text must be preserved in translation, whether in the text itself, or the paratext, e.g., in an explanatory footnote, a glossary entry, or a cross-reference.

Just as there are many different types of Bible translation on the market nowadays, so there are a variety of *media* available for communicating these versions to the public, a subject to which we now turn.

## 5. Media of Translation

Roman Jakobson proposed a fundamental threefold categorization of translation into “intra-lingual,” “inter-lingual,” and “inter-semiotic” versions (Jakobson 1959:261: (a) is the process of “rewording” a text, which might also involve reconceptualizing it, that is, within the same language, “paraphrase”; (b) is “translation proper,” which occurs between two different languages; and (c) “transmutation” refers to the transfer of a text from one medium to another (see Munday 2008:5). In any case, translation always comprises similarity or essential “equivalence in difference.” That is to say, “For the message to be ‘equivalent’ in the ST [source text] and TT [target text], the code-units will be different since they belong to two different sign systems (languages) which partition reality differently...” (ibid.:37; cf. Pym 2023:ch.2). In other words, the same text “message” will need to be communicated differently with regard to form, content, and/or function via a different medium of communication. Several familiar illustrations follow.

### 5.1 Written, Published Text

Any Bible publication, however it has been translated, needs to be framed either within or somewhere outside of the Scripture text, depending on the project skopos (for whom, for what purpose, etc.). Nowadays most modern translations are accompanied by a number of reader-oriented supplementary aids (the so-called “paratext”), for example: explanatory study notes, cross references, section headings (titles), book introductions, a glossary of key terms, a small concordance perhaps, and most important, illustrations (charts, drawings, photos, maps, etc.).

Furthermore, producers must consider the assorted options that pertain to the published display of the translated text on the page of print in terms of the typography and format. Thus, a scrupulous publisher would need to determine reader preferences, abilities, and needs concerning variables such as these:



- the use of one versus two columns of print;
- justified versus ragged-right margins;
- the most readable and yet also economical size of print;
- the incorporation of different font styles (italics, boldface, underline, caps, etc.) for the purposes of highlighting or differentiating text types (e.g., a title or section heading as distinct from the main biblical text);
- the use of vertical space to indicate principal discourse breaks and horizontal space to reveal major text parallels or contrasts, chiasmic structures, and other important patterns of formal or topical arrangement;
- a delineation and display of the text in terms of ideal “utterance units” so that it is more legible and easier to read aloud.

Of course, some extensive, systematic, readership research plus a sufficient amount of trial and testing would be necessary in order to determine which among such graphic features actually assist average users in perceiving and comprehending the biblical text. If helpful, then which ones would be most important and affordable, in keeping with a project’s guiding job commission and primary purpose?

## 5.2 Other Media of Transmission

Research has shown that even a printed text of Scripture is most frequently conveyed to people by the medium of sound—that is, through simple speech or some enhanced mode of oral transmission, e.g., preaching, recitation, chanting, singing, an audio (visual) recording. If the intended audience does not have access to the visible printed version, then certain adjustments to the text and/or its vocal articulation will need to be made in order to enhance comprehension, such as:

- employing a relatively slower rate of speech;
- an appropriate, varied volume level;
- inserting short and long pauses for mental catch-up;
- the use of occasional repetition or paraphrase;
- perhaps even the inclusion of additional explanatory and clarifying comments or giving the audience an opportunity to ask questions.

An audio-visual presentation, too, requires considerable care and often technical skill in its preparation. Illustrations or background settings must be chosen that highlight or help to clarify the biblical text rather than the opposite, such as unrelated or controversial pictures which might distract from or distort the message. Every speaker’s voice qualities need to be carefully tested and evaluated before any final production with respect to character, e.g., God, Moses, pharaoh, Jesus, Mary, Satan, Peter. Esthetic preferences may vary considerably from one cultural setting to the next regarding male as well as female vocal features and in terms of definable (e.g., loudness, tempo) as well as connotative properties (e.g., dignity, beauty, sweetness, etc.).

The modern use of electronic and internet media makes “multimodal” communication possible, including the incorporation of a hypertext reference system where a simple “click” immediately leads to some other source of supplemental text-related information or a graphically illustrative visual display. The biblical text, such as a Gospel narrative, a parable of Christ, or a short epistle, can even be dramatized by live speaker-performers to generate perhaps the greatest audience impact and appeal. But along with the increased communicative capacity also comes a greater risk of the medium diminishing or detracting from the message and reducing its effectiveness, for example, by the use of anachronistic, contemporary background illustrations—or a contemporary popular melody that does not

jibe with solemnity of the biblical narrative. The presence of characters whose vocal features, personality traits, or actual performance qualities do not measure up to audience expectations and preferences can also cause some significant problems of audience perception and acceptance.

Some of the communicative variables discussed above can be assessed in greater detail by considering the following actual samples of non-English Bible translations from a manifold functionalist perspective.

## 6. Models of Translation

### 6.1 A functional skopos framework

The range of different models and modes of English Bible translations that we have available today is almost mind-boggling. Is this a great benefit or perhaps a bane to individual readers as well as church bodies? We will consider this critical, but possibly controversial question in conclusion. But before that, we must review some of the key principles of modern “functional” translation practice, for these not only provide a helpful foundation for undertaking any new translation of Scripture, but they also offer a framework for evaluating the variety of options that we have at hand. This is especially helpful for those versions that we either have a habit of using regularly or, on the other hand, we have certain doubts or questions about, for example, how did translation X come to be, or why was it produced in the way it was?

The importance of developing an explicit operational agenda for translating (the *practice*), has been greatly stressed in recent translation studies. As was mentioned earlier, in “functionalist” terminology this has reference to the project commission, or translation brief, which explicitly sets forth “information about the intended target-text function(s), the target text addressee(s), the medium over which it will be transmitted, the prospective place and time and, if necessary, motive of production or reception of the text” (Nord 1997:137). The crucial component of every brief is the particular communicative purpose, or *skopos*, for which the translation is being made for its primary audience and setting of use in keeping with prevailing social and translational norms in the target society.

But what seems to be missing in this functionalist agenda—something that would be of concern to any conscientious translator of Holy Scripture? That is the absence of references to the original text and how the requisite “*fidelity*” to that source document is to be achieved and preserved in the translation process. Nord tackles the frequently debatable issue of *authorial intention* that arises in criticism of a functionalist approach with regard to interpretation as well as translation. She refers to the need for this concern as “loyalty” (a helpful alternative to the usual term “fidelity”), which “means that the target-text purpose should be *compatible with* the original author’s intentions” (1997:125; my emphasis). This is a more defensible position than the non-demonstrable criterion of seeking to convey the “*same as*” what the original author intended. But is “compatible with” really a strong enough criterion—as opposed to the more familiar term “equivalent to” (see Wendland 2018:26)? And how can any of these standards of evaluation be measured when we have no direct and immediate access either to the author, his text, or his times?

In fact, as most careful text exegetes know, there is actually quite a broad selection of discourse features that can be used as textual “evidence,” as it were, in such a quest, including both the macro- and micro-structural stylistic properties of the ST. Nord also mentions the following factors (1997:125–126; for specific examples with reference to biblical Hebrew poetry, see Zogbo and Wendland 2020:chs. 3–4:):



- the broad “conventional intentions linked with certain text types”;
- a careful analysis of various *extratextual* background factors pertaining to the original communicative setting that may be derived from biblical *intertextual* and socio-historical studies;
- and above all (in my opinion) “a thorough analysis of *intratextual* function markers ... to find out about the communicative intentions that may have guided the author.”

Included in these studies would be a systematic and multifaceted, yet also carefully integrated analysis that in addition to exegetical content (semantics), fully examines the structural arrangement (tectonics) and rhetorical argumentation (forensics) of the source language document. The intentions of the authors (and editors) of Scripture are thus clearly revealed by a careful examination of the texts that they have composed.

On the other hand, a specification of the primary functions of the SL text is only part of the translator’s task. The corresponding challenge is to determine *which* of these functional denotative and connotative intentions can be conveyed in the TL and *how* this will be done. What are the suitable stylistic devices and rhetorical strategies available as equivalents in the TL according to the literary conventions that would apply to the biblical genre and textual setting concerned (cf. Nord 1997:88)? In my experience, this is where most vernacular translations fail or tend to underperform—that is, in utilizing the full idiomatic resources of the local language to reproduce not only the content, but also the beauty, power, impact, and appeal of the biblical text.

We thus come to a recognition of the *impossibility* of a goal that seeks to convey *all* the formal, semantic, and pragmatic values—the full, exegetical “meaning potential”—of the received text of Scripture via any current translation. Therefore, a judicious *choice* must always be made between those functional aspects of the SL message which the translators will at least attempt to convey and those they concede will probably be eclipsed during the transmission process. Issues such as these will need to be fully discussed and then spelled out within the project job commission and its guiding declaration of purpose. It was interesting in my research to observe that many of the translation principles and procedures which Nord and others have developed within a *skopos* framework correspond quite well with my own perspective as presented earlier with reference to a literary rendition of the Scriptures.

The point is that the entire preparatory stage of research and planning for any new or renewed translation project must be fully *interactive* within the target-language community and freely *negotiated* between the proposed Bible text producer, or publisher, and all interested TL consumer groups. Thus, there should be a continual give-and-take dialogue in order to establish the primary objectives and principles of the administrative working document for the entire project. This official position statement, or job description, is what subsequently determines and guides how the overall program will be administered and monitored, as well as *when* (the projected time-frame), *where* (central office and review locations), and *by whom* (i.e., the type and desired competency of translation staff, both official and auxiliary, that are needed to get the job done in the most efficient and productive manner). The crucial issues of ongoing quality-control and final audience testing must also be clearly stated in this translation brief, which may then serve as the basis for composing a formal introduction to any new or subsequent re-translation of God’s Word and also for popularizing it among the projected community of text “consumers.”

## 6.2 Example of a Translation Brief—the Chichewa Buku Loyera

Space allows for only one abbreviated example of a translation brief, namely, that of the *Buku Loyera*, a relatively recent “popular language” (Wonderly 1971) Bible translation in Chichewa, a major Bantu language of SE Africa. This description is based on a “frames of reference” model of project contextualisation (Wendland 2014), which formed the basis for drawing up a guiding translation commission for the project (adapted below from the more extensive published version).<sup>11</sup> These “frames” refer to the macro-level parameters that may be used for defining the broader and more local situational dimensions of any major communicative event (for the language-specific details of this project, see Wendland 1998).

*Buku Loyera* (BY—“Holy Book”—1998):

*Conceptual frames*: concern world-view issues and the indigenous belief system, as determined by pre-project research and published popular as well as scholarly literature.

*Sociocultural frames*: define the primary target audience (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> language speakers in the 15-35 year age group, with special reference to women, youth, and non-literates) with reference to their life setting and social environment, rural as well as urban.

*Organizational frames*: delineate the new Chichewa version as an interconfessional project, involving Catholics and Protestants, as organized and sponsored by the Bible Society of Malawi and influenced by various governmental agencies (e.g., educational) and NGOs (e.g., culture-support groups).

*Textual frames*: specify matters with reference to the agreed-upon project brief, including the established units of translation, a vernacular orthography and style guide, team working procedures, principles of production management and administration, methods of testing and quality control.

This textual frame was further specified as follows: A rigorous check-and-balance system within the three-person team (plus typist) was employed in the production of every draft. A four-stage “translate-and-test” method was consistently observed, as outlined below:

- a) A *first draft* version was composed, usually by the chief translator, and this was then carefully checked and revised as necessary by the entire translation team.
- b) A *revised* draft was jointly prepared by the team as a whole with explicit reference to the comments received from all key reviewers as well as a number of specialist respondents (e.g., Hebrew and Greek as well as Chewa experts).
- c) A *second revised* draft was composed and then circulated for review on the basis of a major text-checking workshop conducted by a UBS translation consultant.
- d) A *final draft* was copy-edited for publication in response to comments received from a complete manuscript examination carried out at the Lusaka UBS Translation Centre.

Evaluation:

More widespread, popular critical feedback in relation to the new translation was gained through the publication of a series of small “Scripture portions” (John, 1 Peter, Psalms) as well as the entire New Testament (*Chipangano Chatsopano* – 1977). Catholic and Lutheran churches made use of pre-final drafts in their annually circulated liturgical readings. Other project promotional activities were also attempted, such as: radio interviews, secular and religious newspaper reports, and talks at various

<sup>11</sup> For the full Chichewa and other examples of translation briefs, see Appendix F in Timothy 2003; cf. also the “Appendix” of Nida and Taber 1969.

church-organized meetings. Approval of the final-final text submitted by the translation team was given by the current United Bible Societies Translation Consultant in conjunction with the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Malawi. A number of comments regarding the *Buku Loyera* have been received since it was published, and a revision is currently being carried out in conjunction with the preparation of a more heavily annotated New Testament “study Bible” edition (from 2001–17).

A short sample of the functional-equivalence *Buku Loyera* translation follows along with an English back-translation (Rev. 4:9–11):

<p><sup>9</sup> Zamoyozo zimapereka ulemerero, ulemu ndi mayamiko kwa uja wokhala pa mpando wachifumuyu, amene ali ndi moyo wamuyaya. <sup>10</sup> Pamene zikuchitika zimenezi, Akuluakulu 24 aja amadzigwetsa pamaso pa wokhala pa mpando wachifumuyo, ndi kumpembedza wokhala ndi moyo wamuyayayo. Ndipo amaponya pansi zisoti zao zaufumu patsogolo pa mpando wachifumuwo ndi kunena kuti,</p> <p><sup>11</sup> “Inu Ambuye athu ndi Mulungu wathu, ndinu oyenera kulandira ulemerero, ulemu ndi mphamvu, pakuti ndinu mudalenga zinthu zonse. Mudafuna kuti zonsezo zikhalepo, ndipo zidalengedwa.”</p>	<p>9 The living things offer glory, honor and praise unto the one sitting on the throne, who has life everlasting. 10 Whenever they do these things, those twenty-four Elders throw themselves face down at the one sitting on the throne, and they worship that one who has life everlasting. And they cast down their crowns in front of the throne and say,</p> <p>11 “You our Lord and our God, it is you who are worthy to receive glory, honor and power, for it is you who created all things. You willed that all things would be there, and they were created.”</p>
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### 6.3 Examples of Literary Functional Equivalence Versions

The two selections below illustrate Psalm 1:1–2 in two poetic (*LiFE*) renditions that have each adopted an indigenous lyric genre and oratorical style—first, a Tonga *chiyabilo*, followed by a Chewa *ndakatulo*. These Bantu translations are not necessarily intended for liturgical use or for communal utterance in a setting of public worship. Rather, the project brief and *skopos* specify these compositions as possibly serving a much narrower, yet still important communicative purpose, namely, to inspire nationally popular youth choirs to adopt a more natural local model as the basis for a sung version of the psalm in their mother tongue. This type of musical rendering would undoubtedly be a more attractive and hence captivating method of conveying the biblical text in certain contemporary contexts and would hopefully encourage group members to compose additional creations of well-known psalms in the vernacular.

- v. 1 Ooyo ukaka kulaya kwababi, m'muntu uulilelekedwe.  
*The one who rejects the advice of the wicked, he's a blessed person.*  
 Ngoyooyo nzila zya basizinyonyoono uutazitobeli naaceya.  
*It is that one the way of sinners he does not follow even a little.*  
 Aabo basikusampaula Leza, takkali aabo—pe, pe, pe.  
*Those who despise God, he does not sit with—no, no, no.*
- v. 2 Uliboobo ulakondwa mu milawo ya Mwami Leza.  
*One like that rejoices in laws of the Lord God.*  
 Lyoonse buyo, kusiye buce, nkuyeeya majwi aakwe.  
*All the time, [whether] it's dark [or] it's light, [he] is thinking of his words.*

Now for the Chichewa Version of Ps. 1:1–2:

Kudalatu munthu woongoka  
nzeru za oipa samverako,  
m'njira ya ochimwa sayendamo,  
onyoza Chauta sakhala nawo.  
Koma kukhosi mbee! akamva mau,  
  
ee, malamulo a Mulungu apo ndipo,  
usana ndi usiku mtima amaikapo,  
kusinkhasinkhatu salekezako.

*How very blessed is the straight person—  
to the wisdom of the wicked he pays no heed,  
in the way of sinners he does not walk,  
with the despisers of Yahweh he has no part.  
But his neck is MBEE!—so clear,  
as he hears the words,  
yes, the laws of God, that's where he's at,  
day and night his heart is placed there,  
deep meditation he never abandons.*

## 7. Possible Applications of Bible Translation Studies

### 7.1 Choosing a translation

It has already been emphasized that the Bible version a person desires or needs will depend on what they want to use it for, in which setting of communication, and through the transmission of which medium (Wendland & Noss 2012). In most cases, there is no “one size fits all” translation, and often a significant “trial and error” period of time and testing may be necessary before one is able to fully evaluate and select a particular version for a specific setting of use. In the end, their conclusion might well and rightly be: “I cannot do with only one—I need two (or more) versions for this or that purpose in private or public life.”

### 7.2 Evaluating translations

A basic understanding of the procedure of translating and how to appraise the various translations that have been, and are being, published on almost an annual basis is a much-needed capability for scholars, clergy, and ordinary readers alike. Why is this necessary? It is simply because just about every new version that comes on the market today tends to either overstate, at least to some degree, its own communicative potential, or it mistakenly (perhaps deliberately?) criticizes the aims and results of other, often competing versions. Here is one example below (*italics added*)—how would you assess these claims (Ryken 2002:10)?

By an essentially literal translation [e.g., the *English Standard Version*, ESV] I do not mean one that renders the original text so literally as to be incomprehensible to English readers. The syntax must be English rather than Hebrew or Greek, and idioms that are incomprehensible to English readers need to be rendered in terms of meaning rather than literal equivalence. But within the parameters of these necessary deviations from the original, an essentially literal translation applies the same rules as we expect from a published text in its original language: *The author's own words are reproduced, figurative language is retained instead of explained, and stylistic features and quirks of the author are allowed to stand as the author expressed them.*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ryken 2002:10; see also (<http://pneumareview.com/leland-ryken-the-word-of-god-in-english/>). “The twentieth century witnessed the publication of over one hundred English translations of the New Testament, and since the turn of the millennium, with the rising trend of scholars publishing independent translations, the rate of production shows no signs of slowing down” – Z.K. Dawson in his review of *The New Testament: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Translation* by Michael Straus (Wipf & Stock, 2019; [https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/13183\\_14705.pdf](https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/13183_14705.pdf)).

Hoffman (2020) critiques Ryken's presuppositions and approach as follows:<sup>13</sup>

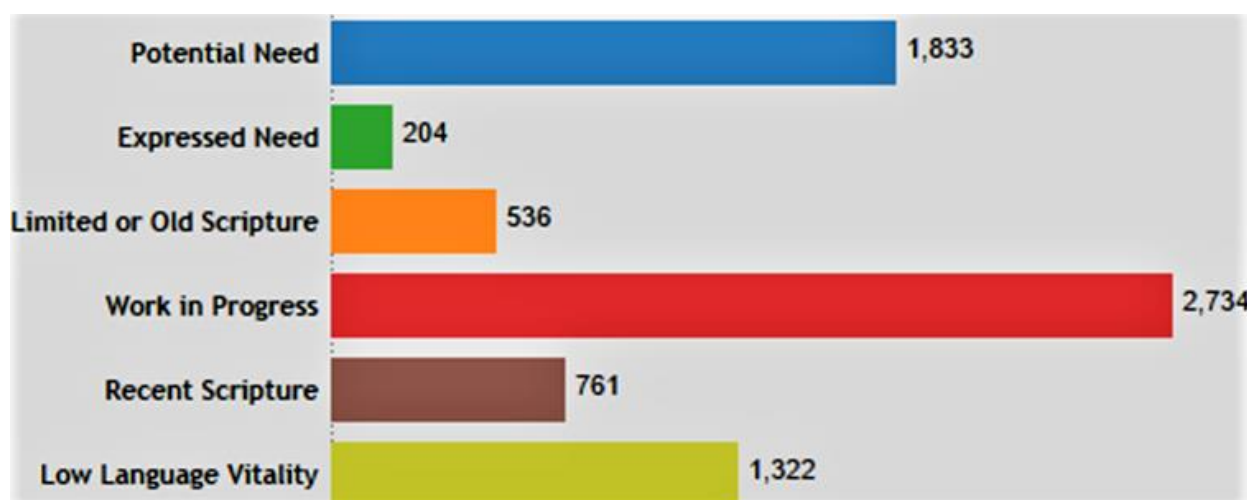
Similar though less subtle is his definition of "linguistic conservatism" (his approach), which offers (2002:20) "an implied contrast to the 'liberalism' of dynamic equivalence, which *does not feel bound* to reproduce the actual Hebrew and Greek words" (my italics). The snide slight "does not feel bound" contrasts with his praise for essentially literal translation, as for example on p. 131, where he states that committees that adopt the latter strategy, "*keep their eye* on what the original text says" (my italics). On p. 33, Ryken pits essentially literal translation against other approaches by what he calls, "[f]idelity to the words of the original vs. feeling free to substitute something in place of those words." Even in the phrasing, we see Ryken's bias.

### 7.3 Using translations

This point complements what was expressed in 7.1 above. Most Scripture scholars, researchers, and teachers in theological schools or universities never examine a biblical pericope in the original without reference to more than one translation, whether in the classical texts, e.g., the LXX or Vulgate, or in modern languages—their own MT and others. The suggestion here is that it would be helpful also for lay persons to get into this habit during their personal and communal Bible study sessions. It is very instructive, for example, to comparatively reference both a more literal version, like the ESV, and a meaning-based translation, like the GNB or NLT, in order to explore such issues as: What and where are the major *differences* (the easy part), and am I able to explain *why* (a more difficult issue)? Is it a matter of form or meaning (i.e., content, intent, connotation, quality), and how does one version serve to shed light on, or complement the other? Such a simple procedure, if regularly practiced, can greatly enrich and expand upon any methodical investigation of God's Word.

However, the issue of "using translations" has another aspect that also needs to be considered. The fact that a translation exists in language X does not necessarily mean that it will be always or regularly be read. Other factors may come into play, for example, the translation may be in competition with more popular majority languages; the translation may be too literal and therefore difficult to understand; conversely, the style may be too dynamic for a conservative religious community; the literacy rate is relatively low, and so forth. It would be important to thoroughly research all the possible factors pertaining to perceived need and preference *before* a new project is undertaken. For example, according to a survey carried out in 2021, the various Bible translations being considered among the world's 7000+ languages may be categorised as falling in one or more of the categories indicated on Figure 3 below (taken from ProgressBible™ SNAPSHOT, April 2021, <https://progress.bible/>). Of special concern, and an issue requiring further in-depth research, is the last-listed item: "Low Language Vitality." Should a Bible translation be undertaken in such a language, and if so, for what purpose and under which conditions?

<sup>13</sup> Joel M. Hoffman, [https://goddidntsaythat.com/tag/essentially-literal-translation/\(30/09/2009\)](https://goddidntsaythat.com/tag/essentially-literal-translation/(30/09/2009)). For a scholarly critique of the ESV (and others like it), see the excellent study by Mark L. Strauss: [https://www.academia.edu/42907025/Form Function and the Literal Meaning Fallacy in Bible Translation](https://www.academia.edu/42907025/Form_Function_and_the_Literal_Meaning_Fallacy_in_Bible_Translation)). For a literary critic's trenchant critique of a literal method of translating secular and well as biblical texts, see Barnstone 1993.



**Figure 3. Evaluating the Current Bible Translation Need**

#### 7.4 Contributing to a translation project

It would be a greatly rewarding and productive application of their knowledge and experience if Bible scholars, teachers, and advanced theological students in every country would become involved in some aspect of the production process. This could be as translators, reviewers, testers, specialist consultants, study note producers, Scripture-use promoters, or financial sponsors of this vital aspect of proclaiming God’s Word to the nations. Such widespread support is needed especially for those people groups or segments of a certain society who still lack a translation, or who need a revised version that speaks to them more accurately and naturally in their MT/1<sup>st</sup> language. In most countries of the world today, there is some type of (re)translation or supplementation project underway (e.g., an annotated “study Bible”), so committed freewill contributors are always needed and most welcome.

#### 7.5 Concluding Caveat—Agree or Disagree?

Throughout this presentation, in addition to understanding the parameters, the importance also of upholding the ongoing work of Bible translation has been underscored. In conclusion, however, we might consider a possible negative aspect of the proliferation of new versions in some larger language communities, like English. How would you respond, for example, to the following opinion (expressed by Mark Ward in “A Rising Tide,” 2020—italics added)?

We lost something as an English-speaking church when the dominance of the KJV began to erode. KJV phrases were common coin; we memorized verses together by accident just by living within the Christian community. It seems unlikely to me that we will ever regain the value of a universal standard English Bible translation. It’s kind of hard to have one without a monarch governing the English church. So I suggest we focus on what we have gained in our multi-translation situation, and unite to take steps to protect those things. When the NIV, NASB, and other modern [“centrist”] renderings achieved widespread usage, we gained the insight into God’s word that multiple legitimate perspectives, on different parts of that continuum, provide. *We may threaten even that value—decreasing trust in what we now have—if more centrist translations keep coming. A rising tide sinks all boats!*

Ward here is speaking about the situation in *English*, but how about other major languages which can boast of a variety of Scripture versions? Is this diversity a bane or a blessing, and is the concern expressed above one that could apply to your Christian community? In short, is it possible to have *too many* published translations available to all? Whatever the answer, the main aim of this investigation has been to encourage, along with serious and sustained Bible *use*, a renewed *support* of translation agencies around the world that are endeavouring to faithfully convey the Word of God in the world's abundance of languages, especially those that do not yet have a viable version in their mother tongue or "favored language."

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