

Bible Translation

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Function + Loyalty: Theology Meets Skopos

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Abstract: Bible translation is traditionally in the hands of theologians, whose focus is on the meaning of the source text rather than on what modern readers are able to understand. This paper attempts to show where translation theory, or more specifically, the Skopos theory of translation, may help Bible translators to produce texts that “work” or “function” for the intended audience without betraying their trust that they are reading God’s word in their own language. After a brief overview of the development of Translation Studies, we shall take a quick look at some guiding principles of Bible translation, as explained in prefaces of modern versions, before presenting the main ideas of Skopos theory and illustrating them by a few examples from the New Testament. The conclusion will sum up the fundamental hypotheses of the skopos-theoretical concept “Function + Loyalty.”

Keywords: Purpose, functionalism, loyalty, translation brief, audience orientation

Introduction

Bible translation as a practice looks back many centuries, while Translation Studies is still struggling for recognition in Academia. Although Bible translators themselves have reflected on their activity since the days of St. Jerome, Translation Studies, as a discipline in the modern sense, and with it translation theory, originated around the 1960s. Ironically, such studies were inspired by the first attempts to make translators superfluous by creating automatic translation programmes. The following definition of translation by Anthony Oettinger shows this very clearly:

Interlingual translation can be defined as the replacement of elements of one language, [...], by equivalent elements of another language, [...]¹

Nevertheless, Translation Studies has seen a number of overlapping, and partly still co-existing, paradigms or “turns.”² Due to its origin in Contrastive Linguistics, it started off with a strictly linguistic approach, seeking for “equivalence” between elements of language systems. Later, under the influence of Pragmatics and Text Linguistics, it sought equivalence between segments of language use in texts or discourse or even whole texts as utterances-in-situation or “messages.” This can be seen in the following definitions:

Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL).³

1 Oettinger, *Automatic Language Translation*, 110.

2 Cf. Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies*.

3 Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, 20.

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Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message.⁴

Despite these variations, it was always language that was at the centre of the discipline. Translation was seen mainly as a linguistic code-switching operation and something like the well-known garden-path sentence, “Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana” would seem to be an insurmountable obstacle for any translator.

In the early 1960s, Eugene A. Nida presented his “sociolinguistic” approach to Bible translation with its distinction between formal and dynamic (later: functional) equivalence.⁵ He pronounced himself in favour of the latter and emphasized the purpose of the translation, the roles of both the translator and the receivers, and the cultural implications of the translation process.

A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behaviour relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message.⁶

However, when trying to apply this idea to translation in general, he turned back to a basically linguistic approach, whose similarity with Noam Chomsky’s theory of syntax and generative grammar⁷ is not accidental. Unfortunately, his model of analysing the linguistic kernel or near-kernel structures of the source text in order to identify its meaning had more influence on the development of translation theory in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s than did the idea of dynamic equivalence.

Text meaning was also the focus of scholars in Literary Studies and Comparative Literature who turned to (literary) translation, pursuing a hermeneutical approach. They followed in the footsteps of the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, who regarded translations as a way to “take the reader to the text.” In this tradition, it was not grammar and syntax but the semantic qualities of text segments and (later!) texts that they were seeking, but equivalence (at the various levels of language use) remained the unquestioned standard for translation.

The problem with equivalence was the “fuzziness” of the concept. Some defined it as “invariance of content,”⁸ others as “invariance of text function,”⁹ others as “invariance of intended communicative effect,”¹⁰ to name but a few authors publishing in German. After discussing the concept under the heading “The illusion of equivalence,” Mary Snell-Hornby comes to the conclusion that

equivalence is unsuitable as a basic concept in translation theory: the term equivalence, apart from being imprecise and ill-defined (even after a heated debate of over twenty years) presents an illusion of symmetry between languages which hardly exists beyond the level of vague approximations and which distorts the basic problems of translation.¹¹

It was not until the end of the 1970s that two rather different turns led to a change in perspective, diverting the focus of attention from the source text to the target text. One was the empirically based descriptive study of translations in their new environment, i.e. the target culture, as represented by scholars like Gideon Toury in Israel, and scholars at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. The other one was the Skopos theory proposed by the German scholar Hans J. Vermeer, whose later developments and applications are now well known under the name of “functionalism.” But before going a little more into the details of this theory, let us look at the current situation of Bible translation.

⁴ Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 12.

⁵ Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, see also Nida, *A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation*.

⁶ Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, 159.

⁷ Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*; Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*.

⁸ E.g. Kade, *Qualitätsstufen der Übersetzung*.

⁹ E.g. Reiss, *Texttyp und Übersetzungsmethode*.

¹⁰ E.g. Svejcer, *Übersetzung und Linguistik*.

¹¹ Snell-Hornby, *Translation Studies*, 22.

Bible Translation

In spite of Eugene Nida's theory of Bible translation, which has influenced the training and practice of many Bible translators working for the American Bible Society, references to translation theory or translation studies are rather scarce in the prefaces of existing translations of the Bible. To get an overview, I analysed the version information provided with 17 English versions of the Bible available on www.biblegateway.com (February 2016), looking at the information given about the translators or translation teams and the translation philosophy, i.e. the goals and strategies that guided the translation process. From this analysis, it becomes clear that

- a) there is hardly any reference to the translators, except to their number (ESV 2001: 100+, MEV 2014: 47, CEV 1995: over 120, ASV 2000: 30), geographic origin (ESV 2001: "from 12 countries", CEB 2011: "men and women from 24 faith traditions in American, African, Asian, European and Latino communities"), denominational affiliation (MEV: "from a wide range of denominations", ESV 2001: "representing nearly 20 denominations") and "expertise in such areas as Old Testament, New Testament, Hebrew language, Greek language, English language, linguistics, and poetry" (CEV 1995); in ESV 2001 we are told that they are professors of Theology or Divinity, Old or New Testament (one of English);
- b) there is hardly any reference to cultural aspects, except NRSV 1989 and NIV 1984 mentioning "new discoveries about the biblical world" and "the latest discoveries about biblical languages and the biblical world," respectively;
- c) nor is there any mention of Translation Studies; the only indirect references are to Nida's "formal equivalence" (MEV 2014) and the concept of "natural equivalent" (GW 1995) from the definition quoted above;
- d) with regard to content, the emphasis is on "faithfulness" (GNT 1992) or "fidelity" (GW 1995) to the source texts, the "accuracy" and "integrity" (CEV 1995) of the rendering: "each word and phrase ... has been carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity and to avoid under-translating or overlooking any nuance of the original text" (ESV 2001). The underlying idea is obviously to create a kind of functional equivalent: "to keep the language of the gospel message current, fresh, and understandable—the way it was for its very first readers" (TLB 1971), or to produce "a version for our time—designed to be read by contemporary people in the same way as the original *koine* Greek and Hebrew manuscripts were savored by people thousands of years ago" (MSG 2002);
- e) how "word-for-word accuracy" can be "combined with literary excellence, beauty and depth of meaning" (ESV 2001), and how this can be done by a team of over 100 translators, reviewers and oversight scholars (ESV 2001), remains in the dark;
- f) there does not seem an agreement on whether "paraphrase" is a good thing or a bad thing in Bible translation, as the following three quotes show:
 - "The CEV is not a paraphrase. It is an accurate and faithful translation of the original manuscripts." (CEV 1995)
 - "The Living Bible is a paraphrase of the Old and New Testaments." (TLB 1971)
 - "The AMP [strives for accuracy] through the use of explanatory alternate readings and amplifications to assist the reader in understanding what Scripture really says."
- g) the traditional principle from the grammar translation method, "as literal as possible, as free as necessary," is felt everywhere, but it is explicitly mentioned by NRSV 1989, which is, by the way, the only version with information referring to non-sexist language in the target text ("masculine-oriented language should be eliminated"). The more recent translations emphasize that they either retain (KJ21 1994) or avoid (CEV 1995) Biblical English, striving for a language and style "accessible to a broad range of people" and "written at a comfortable level for nearly all English readers" (CEB 2011). Along the same lines, the addressed audience is usually defined very broadly (NRSV 1989: "truly a Bible for all Christians"), hoping, as the version information of the CEV puts it in their "three principles" that:
 1. must be understood by people without stumbling in speech,
 2. must be understood by those with little or no comprehension of "Bible" language,
 3. must be understood by all.

The analysis shows that an encounter of Bible translation with Translation Studies, or rather Skopos theory, might be fruitful.

Skopos Theory

Preliminary Considerations

The dichotomy between “literal” and “free,” which is repeatedly mentioned in the version information we analysed, has been a constant in the history of translation. From Cicero, who made a distinction between translating “ut interpres” (like a translator) or “ut orator” (like an orator),¹² and St. Jerome (*verbum e verbo / sensum de sensu*),¹³ to Schleiermacher (taking the reader to the text / taking the text to the reader) and Nida (formal vs. dynamic equivalence, see above), Venuti (foreignising / domesticating translation)¹⁴ and many others, translators of all centuries found themselves confronted with this “eternal dilemma.” Usually, they give preference to one of the two basic strategies, sometimes even declaring it to be “translation proper” as compared to the other one (e.g. Schleiermacher). The functional approach tries to resolve this problem.

In functional translation theory, translating is regarded as a “purposeful activity.”¹⁵ A translation process does not automatically lead from a source to a target text. The translator is an expert of intercultural communication carrying out a communicative activity directed at a particular communicative purpose or various purposes. These purposes are usually specified, tacitly or explicitly, in some kind of translation brief by another person acting as commissioner. They are directed at other people who are acting as receivers of the message. Communication takes place in situations that are limited in time and place and determine what and how people communicate. Situations are not universal but embedded in cultural habitats, which in turn condition each situation.

The source text is or was produced under a set of source-culture conditions for a source-culture audience. Its form and content is therefore determined by these conditions, including the text producer’s communicative purposes and their assessment of the conditions under which the text will be received. The target text will be used in a different situation determined by a different set of conditions influenced by the target culture. This target situation may be set at a different point in time and at some other place (simultaneous interpreting is an exception). Sometimes it is transmitted by another medium (e.g., if the translation of a conference paper is published in the *Proceedings* of the conference). What will definitely be different is the addressed audience, whose general and cultural knowledge, sociocultural background, value systems and world view is determined by their socialization in another culture.

The way a text functions depends on these extratextual or pragmatic factors. Therefore, it is obvious that in order to make a source-culture text work in a target-culture situation the translator has to do more than just “replace textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language,” as Catford put it more than fifty years ago.¹⁶ The function of a text is not inherent in the linguistic signs used to produce it; it cannot simply be extracted by anyone who knows the code and then be transferred to another text. Each receiver, or even the same receiver at different moments, will assign different functions to the same linguistic material, depending on their disposition and their communicative needs. We might even say that a text is as many texts as there are receivers of it.

In professional translation, translators do not translate out of their own accord; they receive a commission from someone who needs a text in the target language for some communicative purpose. Like any other text producer, the translator analyses the (prospective) target situation before deciding on the form and even the content of the new text (e.g. rearranging the information given in the source) in order to make it “function” for the client’s purpose.

¹² Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum*.

¹³ Jerome, *Liber de optimo genere interpretandi*.

¹⁴ Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility*.

¹⁵ Cf. Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*.

¹⁶ Cf. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, 20.

The guiding principle of every translation process is that “the end justifies the means.”¹⁷ This seems to be very simple, but the question is how to define or classify a communicative purpose, and how to deal with communicative purposes. These questions will be addressed in the following paragraphs. For translation teaching, I have designed a model of four basic functions, each with a number of subfunctions,¹⁸ which has been tested with all kinds of different text types and translation briefs. In this paper, the functions will be illustrated by examples from New Testament texts. It should be noted that some time ago I changed the terminology used in earlier publications to the effect that I no longer speak of text functions but of communicative functions *in* texts. Texts are usually intended for a variety of functions, as the examples clearly show.

Theoretical Foundations

The approaches which are nowadays subsumed under the general heading of “functionalism” are based on the Skopos theory (*Skopostheorie*), proposed by the German scholar Hans J. Vermeer.¹⁹ The Greek word *skopos* means “purpose” and, in the theory, usually refers to the communicative purpose of the translational action. If we say that an action has a purpose, we presuppose that the agent has a free will and has to make a choice between at least two possible forms of behaviour. There are usually two or even more ways of expressing a thought or a message, and the translator’s guiding principle for choosing one or the other is, as we have seen, the communicative purpose for which the translation is intended.

If it is the receiver who decides on the functionality of a text, a text producer cannot be sure that a text will actually accomplish the communicative purpose for which it is produced. It would therefore make sense to make a distinction between purpose or intention on the sender’s side, and function on the receiver’s side. In an ideal situation, the sender’s intention would actually find its aim, and if so, there would be a congruity of intention and function. In other cases, intention and function may not be congruent but overlapping. But very often, especially where source and target cultures are separated by a large cultural distance, as is the case in Bible translation, it is impossible that the sender’s intention becomes the text function for the target readership. For example, it would be difficult to imagine a modern audience so similar to the Corinthians that Paul’s letters actually could have the effect intended by the writer.

Function Plus Loyalty

The Bible represents various text types: narratives about miracles and healings, parables, letters, hymns, prayers, theological arguments, visions, songs, etc. Most of these text types could not be used in their original function today even if we knew exactly what function they were intended for in their respective source cultures. Therefore a text-type or equivalence-oriented translation strategy is out of the question. The epistles addressed to early Christian communities in Philippi or Colosse, for example, refer to situations and problems which are only remotely analogous to the situation of Christian communities today.

If we pretended to translate for a virtual analogon of the source text audience, the texts would not be fully comprehensible to modern readers. During the past 2000 years, the history of ideas has changed even the most basic categories of perception and concepts like “person,” “body and soul,” “truth,” “love and hate,” etc.²⁰ The existing translations have been a source of considerable misunderstandings – precisely because they were focused on words and not on concepts or functions. Moreover, no reader in central Europe in the 21st century will read narrations about miracles and healings with the same expectations and reactions as were presupposed in the original audience. Therefore, it would not make any sense to aim at recreating the functions or effects the original texts had or may have been intended to have for their receivers.

¹⁷ Reiss and Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, 90.

¹⁸ Cf. Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation*; Translating for Communicative Purposes across Culture Boundaries, and elsewhere.

¹⁹ Vermeer, Ein rahmen für eine allgemeine translationstheorie; Reiss and Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*.

²⁰ Cf. Berger, *Historische Psychologie des Neuen Testaments*.

Taken seriously, “the end justifies the means” does not seem to be an acceptable principle for cooperation between people. There would not be any limitation to what clients ask translators to do with a particular source text. A general theory does not have to care about ethics. An application of this theory to training or professional practice, however, which takes place at a particular time in a particular place, must take the specific cultural conditions into account. It therefore needs some kind of “code of ethics.”

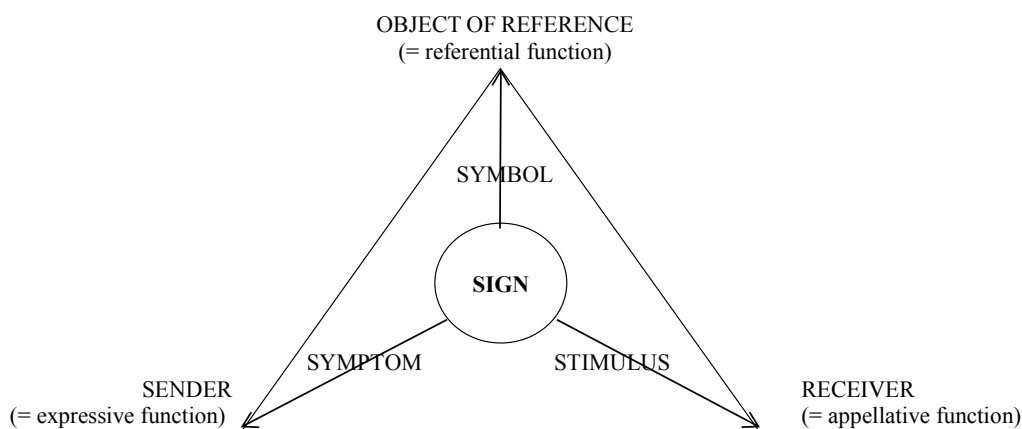
The receivers of a translation may have certain ideas about the relationship between originals and their translations. Some expect a text that reads like an authentic text of their own culture; others think that a translation should sound “strange” because it reflects the different writing styles of another culture. All the different expectations of clients, authors and receivers have to be considered. This does not mean that the translator must please all parties, which may be virtually impossible if they disagree about the qualities of a “good” translation. It means that translators must know about these expectations and try to mediate between divergent attitudes in order to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts which may even lead to communication breakdowns.

Translators are experts in communication, and they are held responsible if communication does not work properly. This responsibility is what I call “loyalty.” In their role as mediators between members of two cultures, they should be loyal towards all their partners in the intercultural interaction. Loyalty is an interpersonal relationship built on mutual trust, a guiding principle between partners who have to rely on each other’s competence, fairness and good will. It is not the old “fidelity” or “faithfulness” in new clothes, which referred to formal linguistic or stylistic similarities between the two texts, but a trusting relationship between persons that will help to strengthen the translator’s image as a responsible partner.

The loyalty principle, which has to go hand in hand with the functionality principle, is thus an important complement to Skopos theory. It obliges the translator to respect the sender’s communicative intentions, as far as they can be elicited, and turns functionalism into an anti-universalist model that takes different culture-specific concepts of translation into consideration. The obligation to be loyal to their cooperation partners may induce translators to reveal their translation purposes and justify their decisions, for example in a foreword, or it could even make them refuse to accept a particular translation task.

The Four-Function Model in Bible Translation

There are quite a few models of language function that could serve as points of departure for the analysis of communicative functions in texts. The four-function model suggested here has a clear focus on translation. It is based on the combination of two previous models: Karl Bühler’s *organon* model²¹ and Roman Jakobson’s model²² of language functions. As a psychologist, Karl Bühler regarded the linguistic sign as a “tool” (in Greek: *organon*) which can be analysed on the grounds of its relationship with the main factors in communication, as depicted in his famous triangle:²³



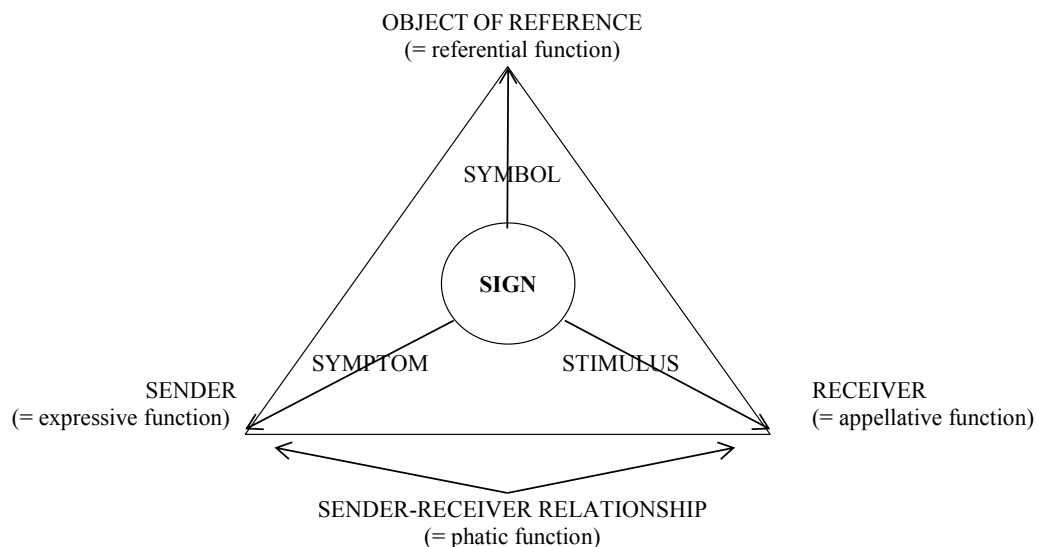
²¹ Bühler, *The Theory of Language*.

²² Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics*.

²³ For the diagram, cf. Nord, *Translating for Communicative Purposes across Culture Boundaries*, 46.

In Bühler's model, the sign (Bühler thought of words, but we could also think of texts or text segments or utterances or even non-verbal elements like a gesture or a tone of voice, as long as the users have agreed on a meaning for it) can be used for three basic functions: referential or representative when used as a symbol of the object of reference, expressive when used as a symptom of the sender's state of mind, and appellative when used as a stimulus intended to move the receiver into some kind of attitude or action.

These three basic functions, although in different terms, are also present in Jakobson's model, which however includes, beside the poetic and the metalinguistic functions, an additional fourth function that we find essential. It is the phatic function, which refers to the channel of communication. This means that some signs are simply intended to make sure that the channel works. We have therefore complemented Bühler's triangular model by adding Jakobson's phatic function as a relationship between the sign, on the one hand, and the sender-receiver contact, on the other:²⁴



In the following paragraphs, we will define and describe these four functions and some of their subfunctions, focusing on the way they work in communicative settings both within and across cultures. We will deal with the phatic function first because, to me, it seems to be the most important of the four basic functions. Where the channel does not work, the other functions will not have a chance of achieving their aim.

The Phatic Function

As we have seen above, Jakobson's definition of the phatic function refers to the channel of communication. It aims at opening and closing the contact between sender and receiver and keeping it open as long as needed. In my own interpretation of the concept, I would add a fourth aim: to make sure that the relationship between sender and receiver works in accordance with their status and the social roles they are taking in a particular situation (expressed, for example, in categories like formal/informal, distance/proximity, and the like). The main specifications of the phatic function would therefore be: a) making contact (e.g., by means of a small-talk about the weather, a greeting, introducing oneself, a title or heading); b) maintaining the channel open (e.g., by means of meta-discourse, topic-comment progression or connectives); c) closing the communicative interaction (e.g., summing up what has been said, saying good-bye); and d) defining and developing the social role relationship (e.g., by using certain forms of address or choosing an appropriate register). Since the definition of social roles is usually part of the opening phase, the fourth specification might also be subsumed under the first.

The few examples mentioned in brackets have already shown that the phatic function is based on the conventionality of (verbal and non-verbal) behaviour. Greetings, forms of address, politeness markers, ways

²⁴ For the diagram, cf. *ibid.*, 47.

of expressing gratitude or regret, even physical distance between partners in communication (“proximity”) or behaviour with regard to time (“chronemics”), gestures and face movements, these are all controlled by conventions which are very often independent of language structures.

Example 1: Phil. 1.1

- ST: Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις.
- KJV: Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons...
- CEB 2011: From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. To all those in Philippi who are God’s people in Christ Jesus, along with your supervisors and servants.
- GNT 1992: From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus— To all God’s people in Philippi who are in union with Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and helpers.
- ERV 2006: Greetings from Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ. To all of you in Philippi who are God’s holy people in Christ Jesus, including your elders and special servants.
- Berger and Nord:²⁵ Paulus und Timotheus ... schreiben diesen Brief an alle Christen in Philippi... [Paul and Timotheus ... are writing this letter to all the Christians at Philippi...].

The phatic function, in its contact-opening sub-function, is marked by a salutation formula which is typical of Paul’s letters. He addresses the members of the Christian community as *saints in Christ Jesus*, which means “people belonging to Jesus” or “followers of Jesus,” whom we would refer to as *Christians* today. With regard to the translation of the salutation formula, the translator has various options. The King James Version decided to render the Greek formula by “saints”, which has the disadvantage that modern lay readers will probably either misunderstand what is meant by *saints* or not understand the text at all. *The Good News Translation* has chosen a reduplicating paraphrase which may also be misleading because it uses a restrictive relative clause: only those of God’s people who are in union with Christ Jesus. A third, more radically adapting option would be to use modern “equivalents” (as the *Easy-to-Read Version* tries to do), beginning the letter with something like “Dear Christians at Philippi” and ending by “Yours faithfully”, “Best regards” or “Take care, Paul and Timothy”. Since the skopos of the Berger and Nord version was to stress the “otherness” of the culture to which these texts belong, the translators decided to establish a kind of intra-biblical convention by using the same opening formula for all the letters. This option has the additional advantage of avoiding the modern forms of address, where we have to choose, in German, between the formal third person *Sie* and the informal second person *ih*r. Modern missionaries writing or preaching in German would probably not use the informal forms of address. But in Bible translation, it has become conventional not to modernize the texts by using the formal address.

The Referential Function

In Example 1, Paul and Timotheus call themselves δοῦλοι, which is almost always translated as “servants” but could also be rendered as “slaves.” Paul and Timotheus live in a society that knows both slaves and servants, whereas, in our cultures, we still have the institution of servants and we have a historical knowledge of slavery, even though slavery has been abolished in most parts of the world (at least in the traditional sense of the word). If Paul and Timothy consider themselves slaves of Jesus Christ (and, therefore, there is no question of political correctness involved here!), they refer to a relationship which is different from that between servant and master: a relation of ownership. Thus, in this context, the word *slave* emphasizes the strangeness of the culture. By paraphrasing the functions of bishops and deacons and referring to them as leaders and helpers (as in GNT 1992 and NIV 1984), the translation aims at avoiding unreflective equations and once again stresses cultural difference. Here, the referential function is crucial.

²⁵ Berger and Nord, *Das Neue Testament und frühchristliche Schriften*.

The referential function relies on an appropriate balance between the information mentioned explicitly in the text and the information that is not mentioned because the addressee is supposed to be familiar with it. If a text offers too much explicit information already known to the audience, they will be bored and stop reading or listening. If they cannot link the explicit information to something they have already stored in their memory, the text will be hard to understand or even incomprehensible for them. Especially in the case of a large temporal or spatial distance between the two cultures involved, the balance between presupposed and new information may have to be changed completely. Implied information with which the new audience is not familiar can be made explicit either in the body of the text or in notes – but the translator has to bear in mind that notes are metatexts, and to process a text with notes, whether at the bottom of the page or at the end of the book, requires more intellectual effort than to read a text that is self-explaining.

Example 2 shows how a lack of cultural knowledge makes an utterance incoherent for modern readers.

Example 2: Luke 6.20

- ST: Καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἔλεγε:...
- KJV: And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said...
- GNT 1992: Jesus looked at his disciples and said...
- MSG 2002: Then he spoke:...
- VOICE 2012: He looked across the faces of His disciples.
- ERV 2006: Jesus looked at his followers and said...
- Berger and Nord:²⁶ Jesus setzte sich, sah seine Jüngerinnen und Jünger an und sagte... [Jesus sat down, looked at his disciples, and said...]

Where are the disciples if Jesus has to lift up his eyes to them? The bit of cultural knowledge the reader may be lacking (and the translators did not think of) is that, in the source culture, teachers used to be seated while they were teaching, with the listeners standing in a circle around them. Since the author assumed this habit to be known by his addressees, he used a generic verb that does not specify how Jesus “is” in the plain, whereas the translator(s) of the King James Version adapted the text to English style conventions which require a specific verb, thus contributing to an image of Jesus with his eyes lifted up to heaven. The same applies to GNT1992, but here the translators obviously detected the incoherence and leveled it out. Now the text is coherent, but the readers automatically envisage a scene that is different from the one described in the original. Berger and Nord explains the situation, thus making the scene comprehensible without reducing its strangeness.

The Expressive Function

As the diagrams show (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2), the expressive function is related to the sender’s attitude towards the things and phenomena of the world or of a particular world. If it is verbalized explicitly (e.g., by means of evaluative or emotive adjectives, verbs or nouns, as in: *I like cats, they are so beautiful*), the readers will understand it even when they disagree. But if the evaluation is given implicitly (like in: *A cat was sitting on the doorstep!*), it may be difficult to grasp for readers who do not know on which value system the utterance is based (is a cat on the doorstep a good or a bad thing?).

Many qualities have different value connotations in different cultures. Sometimes, a translator has to make explicit an implicit evaluation in order to avoid misinterpretations in the target culture. In Example 3, the translator has to deal with a marker of implicit expressivity which is not at all clear. Therefore, we find three different strategies in the translations I have looked at.

Example 3: John 1.5

- ST: καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.
- KJV: And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

²⁶ Ibid.

- AMP 2015: The Light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness did not understand it or overpower it or appropriate it or absorb it [and is unreceptive to it].
- CEV 1995: The light keeps shining in the dark, and darkness has never put it out.
- MOUNCE 2011: The light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.
- ERV 2006: The light[a] shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not defeated[b] it.

Footnotes:

[a] *light* Meaning Christ, the Word, who brought to the world understanding about God. Also in verse 7.
[b] *defeated* or “understood.”

- NIV 1984: The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.
- Berger and Nord:²⁷ Das Licht macht die Finsternis hell, und die Finsternis hat das Licht nicht verschluckt. [The light lightens the darkness, and the darkness did not swallow the light.]

The source text is apparently neutral. The first strategy is to refrain from an interpretation. The King James Version (KJV) and the so-called “literal” translations, render κατέλαβεν by an equally “neutral” or generic verb like *comprehend* or, in German, *ergreifen* (LUTHER 1984). For modern readers, however, this version is not neutral at all. As a little survey among German readers has shown, they tend to automatically interpret the generic verb *ergreifen* themselves, mostly in a negative sense as “darkness (i.e. the world) rejected, did not understand, did not accept the light (i.e. Jesus).” The second strategy is, therefore, to make this interpretation explicit in the translation, as in NIV 1984, AMP or MOUNCE 2011. This interpretation can be regarded as “negative” in the sense of “Darkness rejected / did not accept / did not understand the Light” (as in NIV 1984). The third strategy however, is to make explicit a different, positive interpretation, in the sense of “the Light was so strong that Darkness could not make it disappear.” This strategy is used by CEV 1995, Berger and Nord,²⁸ and ERV 2006, although the latter adds the negative interpretation in a footnote, thus leaving the decision to the readers.

All three strategies lead to evaluative translations, although the first strategy leaves the interpretation to the readers, who might, in some cases, also choose the positive evaluation. The second group of translations clearly suggests a negative evaluation, and draws on the fact that the sentence can be interpreted metaphorically: *darkness* [= *the world*] did not understand or accept the role of *the light* [= *Jesus*]. This is a rather pessimistic interpretation, but it seems obvious to modern readers who know that, after almost 2000 years, the light is far from having won the battle against darkness. The third group interprets the text as a positive evaluation: *the light* was so strong that *darkness* could not overcome it. This is an optimistic interpretation expressing the confidence of being victorious in the end. There were two reasons why Berger and Nord chose the third option, a philological and a logical one: (1) biblical language shows a general tendency to name things in a more concrete manner than what we are used to today (influenced by Platonism); and (2) if you want to attract people to your cause you would probably not start by telling them that it is not worth the effort in the first place. That is, we interpreted the text in the light of its own situation, and translated for an audience in a different situation precisely to make sure that the sense we elicited was clear to the readers.

The Appellative Function

The appellative function appeals to the receivers’ sensitivity or disposition to react, inducing the audience to respond in a particular way. In order to illustrate a hypothesis by an example, we appeal to the audience’s previous knowledge or experience; the intention is to make the audience recognize something they are familiar with. In order to persuade someone to do something or to share a particular viewpoint, we appeal to their secret desires or their sensitivity.

In Example 4 Jesus appeals to the disciples’ experience in order to illustrate his point that their Christian way of living must set a “shining” example to non-Christians.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Example 4: Matt. 5.14-15

- Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη 15 οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ.
- KJV: Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
- GNT 1992: You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house.
- NLT 2013: “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.
- CEV 1995: You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden, 15 and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lampstand, where it can give light to everyone in the house.
- Berger and Nord:²⁹ Und wer ein Licht anzündet, wird keinen Topf darüber stülpen, sondern es auf den Leuchter stellen, damit es allen im Haus hellen Schein gibt. [A person who lights a lamp will not put a pot over it, but place it on a lampstand so that it gives light to all that are in the house.]

Examples can only fulfill their illustrating function if the receiver knows the reality used as a reference. The first example (*the city on the hill*) is rather general and will work with any reader who knows the difference between hills and plains and what a city is. The second example cannot achieve its appellative function if the reader does not know what a *bushel* is and what it looks like. The dictionary tells us that *bushel* is a “biblical word referring to a measure, esp. of grain; about 36.5 litres.”³⁰ But since the utterance is not intended to offer information about a culture where *bushels* may have belonged to the normal equipment of a household, this definition is not very helpful. The exact form of the container is also irrelevant – whether it is a bowl or a pot, whether made of clay or otherwise, does not really matter. To use a basket (NLT 2013) may not be wise because a basket will burn if you put a candle under it. Berger and Nord³¹ introduced another little change: instead of referring to the lamp being put under a bowl (which simply seems a little difficult to manage) Berger and Nord decided to say that the bowl is put *over* the lamp – Vinay and Darbelnet³² would call it a modulation, which makes the example even more natural to visualize.

The Interplay of Functions

By way of conclusion I would like to mention one more aspect of this functional way of solving translation problems. Except for some purely phatic expressions or utterances (like a small-talk about the weather between persons who meet for the first time in a train compartment or at a party), texts are rarely monofunctional. As a rule we find hierarchies of purposes that can be identified by analysing verbal and/or non-verbal function markers. To illustrate this last point, I would like to refer to the description of the “New Jerusalem” in the Book of Revelation. All the translations I have looked at give more or less the same description, which is a “faithful” rendering of the Greek text. There is one discrepancy with regard to the eleventh stone: GNT 1992 gives “turquoise,” whereas according to a more reliable source it is “jacinth” (as in KJV).

There is also a coherence problem in the comparison “gold as clear [καθαρόν] as glass,” in verse 18, and “gold as transparent [διαυγής] as glass,” in Verse 21. As in every comparison from a different culture, we have to analyse the three components: the object to be compared (*comparandum*), the object used for comparison (*comparatum*), and the quality serving as the basis of the comparison (*tertium comparationis*,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Cf. *Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

³¹ Berger and Nord, *Das Neue Testament und frühchristliche Schriften*.

³² Vinay and Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*.

TC). In verse 18, the TC is *katharós*, “clear,” whereas in verse 21, it is *diaugés*. It is the time factor that provides a solution to verse 18. At the time of the New Testament, gold was usually alloyed with copper or even iron (so that it could become rusty, cf. Jas. 5.1-3), so it had to be pure in order to be “clear.” The same applied to glass, which normally showed small inclusions. Thus, the TC must be *perfect purity* in verse 18. In verse 21, the problem is not as easily resolved. In classical Greek, the adjective *diaugés* actually means “transparent,” as the bilingual dictionary tells us, but in contemporary *koine* Greek, the verb *diaugazein* is used with the meaning “to flash” or “to light up” (e.g. the first morning sun); said of metals in the passive form, the verb means “polished,” “shiny.” This obviously makes more sense than “transparent”.

Example 5: Rev. 21.18-21

- ST: καὶ ἡ ἐνδύμησις τοῦ τείχους αὐτῆς ἴασις καὶ ἡ πόλις χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὅμοιον ὕαλω καθαρῷ. 19 οἱ θεμέλιοι τοῦ τείχους τῆς πόλεως παντὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ κεκοσμημένοι· ὁ θεμέλιος ὁ πρῶτος ἴασις, ὁ δεῦτερος σάπφιρος, ὁ τρίτος χαλκηδών, ὁ τέταρτος σμάραγδος, 20 ὁ πέμπτος σαρδόνυξ, ὁ ἕκτος σάρδιον, ὁ ἑβδομος χρυσόλιθος, ὁ ὄγδοος βήρυλλος, ὁ ἕνατος τοπάzion, ὁ δέκατος χρυσόπρασος, ὁ ἐνδέκατος ὑάκινθος, ὁ δωδέκατος ἀμέθυστος, 21 καὶ οἱ δώδεκα πυλῶνες δώδεκα μαργαρίται, ἀνὰ εἷς ἕκαστος τῶν πυλῶνων ἦν ἐξ ἑνὸς μαργαρίτου. καὶ ἡ πλατεῖα τῆς πόλεως χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὡς ὕαλος διαυγής.
- KJV: 18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. 19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; 20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.
- GNT 1992: 18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city itself was made of pure gold, as clear as glass. 19 The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with all kinds of precious stones. The first foundation stone was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh yellow quartz, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chalcedony, the eleventh turquoise, the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each gate was made from a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, transparent as glass.

One of the purposes of this passage is certainly a *referential-descriptive* one. John sees the city in a vision and describes it to his readers. The referential function of this rather technical description works quite well for most readers, and certainly best for those with a specialist knowledge of precious and semi-precious stones. But apart from the referential purpose, the author may have had the intention to *express his admiration* for the city he has seen. Asked about their associations when reading or listening to the text, most people answer that they are thinking of the enormous value represented by the gold and the stones. This, again, is a rather modern perspective. We might wonder why a follower of Jesus, who showed so much contempt for “the world” and its riches himself, would precisely describe his vision of God’s “new creation” as something so rich in material terms. Precisely the great variety of different stones would seem to suggest that perhaps the author’s focus might have been rather on the colours than on the value. On the grounds of the assumption that his addressees knew the colours of all the stones he is describing, he need not mention them explicitly. But if modern translators want their target audience to share the author’s admiration of the beauty and colourfulness of his vision, they would have to make explicit what is implicit in the text.

- Berger and Nord: Die Stadtmauer ist aus Jaspis erbaut, die Stadt selbst aus glasreinem Gold. Die Fundamente der Stadtmauer sind von großer Schönheit, denn sie bestehen aus verschiedenfarbenen Edelsteinen. Das erste Fundament ist aus grünlichem Jaspis, das zweite aus blauem Saphir, das dritte aus rotem Chalzedon, das vierte aus hellgrünem Smaragd, das fünfte aus rotbraunem Sardonyx, das sechste aus gelbrotem Carneol, das siebte aus goldgelbem Chrysolit, das achte aus meergrünem Beryll, das neunte aus gelbglänzendem Topas, das zehnte aus goldgrün schimmerndem Chrysopras, das elfte aus dunkelrotem Hyazinth, das zwölfte aus purpurnem Amethyst. Die zwölf Tortürme sind zwölf Perlen, jeder Torturm besteht aus einer einzigen Perle, und die Hauptstraße der Stadt ist aus glasreinem

Gold. [The city wall is made of jasper, and the city itself of gold that is as pure as glass. The foundations of the city wall are of great beauty, for they are built out of precious stones in many different colours. The first foundation-stone is jasper, the second blue sapphire, the third red agate, the fourth light green emerald, the fifth reddish brown onyx, the sixth yellowish red carnelian, the seventh yellow-gold quartz, the eighth beryl as green as the sea, the ninth shining yellow topaz, the tenth chalcedony, shimmering green-golden, the eleventh deep red jacinth, the twelfth purple amethyst. The twelve gates are twelve pearls, each gate is made from a single pearl. The main street of the city is of gold as shining as glass.]³³

Here it becomes clear that the text has also an expressive-evaluative or emotive function apart from the referential one. But even the expressive purpose may not be the most important one. The vision of the New Jerusalem is presented at the end of last book of the Christian Bible, following the horrors of the apocalypse, and it seems to be the absolute culmination of the Christian message. We may assume, therefore, that there is also an *appellative purpose* underlying the text, since the New Jerusalem presents the ideal of God's new creation, for which a large number of martyrs through history were prepared to give their lives. An appellative intention cannot be carried out by a technical description – for this purpose, we definitely need to know the colours. Therefore, our translation makes explicit the colours. Some critics found that this procedure reduces the poetic effect of the passage. However, the use of adjective compounds to describe the different shades of the stones (e.g., *gelbrot*, “yellow-red”, or *meergrün*, “ocean-green”, *glasrein*, “glass-pure”) is intended to compensate for any loss in poeticity.

In this example, we are also faced with the culture-specificity of aesthetic values. When I presented the example in a conference talk, one listener (from Finland) remarked that the translation reminded him of “Disneyland” – too many different colours, too much light, too much brilliance. A German girl said she did not feel very much attracted to the New Jerusalem because it seemed so cold to her with all the gold and precious stones, not at all “gemütlich” (a typically German concept denoting warmth and coziness). Whereas, when I used the example at a conference in South Africa again some time ago, the audience enthusiastically agreed on the beauty of the picture. One colleague said he was reminded of the colours of the rainbow (which supports the version of the jacinth instead of the turquoise) – and almost the same precious stones are used with reference to the Garden of Eden in Ezek. 28.13. Maybe the love for “screaming” colours comes along with hot climates and spicy food (if we think of Indian saris or the colourful attire of Latin American Indians)?

The example shows that the three functions (referential, expressive, and appellative) are interlinked but that they can be analysed separately from a receiver's point of view. The *skopos* or intended function of Berger and Nord was not to “take the text to the reader,” in Schleiermacher's terms, but to “bridge the gap” between the two cultures by making the source culture accessible to the target-culture readership without taking its strangeness or “otherness” away. This *skopos* can be paraphrased as “Otherness Understood,” and all the decisions that were taken during the translation process were geared to this overall purpose.

Conclusions

As we mentioned above, the *Skopos* theory of translation marks a new “turn” in Translation Studies. The main hypotheses of a functional approach to translation (as, for example, *Skopostheorie*³⁴) can be briefly summed up in the following basic principles:

1. The translation purpose determines the choice of translation method and strategy (functionality principle).
2. The range of the translation purposes allowed for one particular source text is limited by translators' responsibility to their partners in the cooperative activity of translation (loyalty principle). If the client

³³ Berger and Nord, *Das Neue Testament und frühchristliche Schriften*.

³⁴ Cf. Vermeer, Ein rahmen für eine allgemeine translationstheorie; Vermeer, *Skopos* and Commission in Translational action.

asks for a translation that would mean being disloyal to either the author or the target readership or both, the translator should argue this point with the client or perhaps even refuse to produce the translation on ethical grounds.³⁵

3. The translation purpose is defined by the translation brief, which (implicitly or explicitly) describes the situation for which the target text is needed.
4. The most important factor in the target situation is the function or hierarchy of functions expected to be achieved by the target text.
5. Function or functionality is not an inherent quality of a text but one that is attributed to the text by the receiver in the moment of reception. Thus, it is the receiver who decides whether (and how) a text “functions” (for them, in a particular situation-in-culture).
6. A text producer (and the translator as a text producer) should aim at producing a text in such a way that the receivers recognize the function for which it is intended, accepting it as functional precisely in terms of this function. In order to achieve this aim, authors use linguistic and extralinguistic “function markers.” These markers can only be interpreted correctly by the receiver if they belong to a “marker code” with which they are familiar.
7. The function (or hierarchy of functions) intended and/or achieved by the target text may be different from that or those intended and/or achieved by the source text, as long as it is not contradictory to, or incompatible with, the source-text author’s communicative intentions.

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³⁵ Cf. the example in Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 126f.

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- AMP 2015: Amplified Bible.
- ASV 2000: American Standard Version.
- CEB 2011: Common English Bible.
- CEV 1995: Contemporary English Version.
- ERV 2006: Easy-to-Read Version.
- ESV 2001: English Standard Version.
- GNT 1992: Good News Translation.
- GW 1995: GOD'S WORD Translation.
- KJV: King James Version.
- KJ21 1994: King James Version 21st century.
- LUTHER 1984: Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers.
- TLB 1971: The Living Bible.
- MEV 2014: Modern English Version.
- MOUNCE 2011: The Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament.
- MSG 2002: The Message.
- NIV 1984: Holy Bible, New International Version.
- NLT 2013: Holy Bible. New Living Translation.
- NRSV 1989: New Revised Standard Version Bible.
- VOICE 2012: The Voice Bible.