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## **THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND “FOREIGNIZING” FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE BIBLE TRANSLATION**

### **ABSTRACT**

*This review article is written with general reference to a recently published collection of essays dealing with “the social sciences and biblical translation” (Neufeld 2008b) and with special reference to the first essay on “foreignizing translation” by R L Rohrbaugh. There is no doubt that a study of the social sciences is essential as background preparation for any type of translation of the Scriptures, whether more or less literal/free in nature. However, it is necessary to correct or to clarify some of the notions of modern translation theory and practice that this volume seems to propound, particularly in Rohrbaugh’s contribution. I also suggest that the latter’s concept of a “foreignizing” translation might be usefully combined with a “functional equivalence” approach to produce a version that can satisfy many contemporary target audiences, no matter what the language and culture concerned. For an Old Testament example, I briefly refer to the conceptualisation and translation of בְּרִית in the Chewa language of Malawi and Zambia.*

### **1. AN OVERVIEW**

Neufeld summarises his enterprise and that of fellow SBL members of “The *Context Group*: Project on the Bible in its Cultural Environment” (CG) in this volume as follows (2008a:5-6):

To mitigate the forces of social distance, the CG has set itself the task of first understanding and describing the social context of the biblical texts by using Mediterranean anthropology and then, armed with this information, to interpret and provide new translations of a selection of biblical texts and Dead Sea Scrolls. Each of the following essays proceeds by a close analysis of particular passages selected from within the ancient context understood by the use of social-scientific ideas and insights. The stated aim of each of the essays is to understand what meanings these passages would have had to their original, ancient audiences.

The agenda of the CG is ostensibly set forth in the first essay, where Rohrbaugh promotes what he calls “a *foreignizing translation* – ‘a deliberate attempt to stage a culturally alien reading experience that avoids the prevalent ethnocentrism common in Western translations’”

(Neufeld 2008:6). To illustrate this point, the eight subsequent essays tackle a variety of lexical-semantic issues pertaining to “the social systems that the language of the New Testament encodes” (Neufeld 2008:6). Among the topics included are (in brief): “grace” (χάρις) in relation to patronage and benefaction; excommunication as a ritualised group response to pollution (1 Cor 5:1-5); sin and forgiveness as representing social release and status reinstatement (Mk 2:1-12); the socio-economic implications of being “rich” or “poor” (James); “zeal” as distinct from “jealousy” and “envy” in the Scriptures (OT and NT); a “meaning-response” approach to interpreting the sickness and healing reports in Matthew; an “anthropologically-informed” understanding of the Hebrew notion of “heart” (לֵב); and the use of “anti-language” in Qumranic legal documents (e.g. Leviticus in 4QMMT).

All of the essays in this monograph are clearly written and well documented. Although I cannot agree with all of the specific conclusions reached,<sup>1</sup> I do accept that valid, at times rather important, exegetical and translational issues have been raised,<sup>2</sup> which in most cases are fairly argued, that is, without ideological bias. In addition to demonstrating the importance of a “social-scientific” approach for Bible translators, the various Scripture examples discussed in the essays offer a place for translators to begin to test out the suggestions made in relation to the drafts that they are either preparing or in the process of revising. In either case, this comparative exercise is well worth the effort and will no doubt change, modify or sharpen some of the renderings that they have previously agreed upon.<sup>3</sup>

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1 For example, “Translating πλούσιος as ‘greedy rich person’ and πτωχός as ‘degraded poor person’ would better reflect the moral and social connotations of these words” (Batten 2008:76). Neither term would work out very well in James 2:5-6, for example, even if the intention were to produce a “foreignized” rendition.

2 For example, “[T]he polysemous nature of such terms as those of the ζήλος and ζήλος word families requires for their understanding close attention to the literary and social contexts in which they are embedded and employed. ... When this is done...it becomes clearer than heretofore when the terms have the sense of zeal or jealousy or envy. ... Distinguishing between biblical instances of jealousy and envy should be particularly helpful to modern Bible readers who usually equate the terms in everyday parlance” (Elliott 2008:94).

3 For example, “While contemporary interest tends to focus on the sickness events in these healing reports [in Matthew], the main point seems to be rather

In his concluding response to the selection of essays presented in *The social sciences and biblical translation* (hereafter, SSBT), Sandys-Wunch raises several important points of a critical nature:

- “In the case of ancient societies the application of social-scientific theory is limited by the paucity of data” (2008:141). Therefore, its assumptions and claims cannot always be made as strongly or categorically as its practitioners are at times wont to do.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the various conclusions arrived at by the application of social-scientific criticism need to be carefully tested and confirmed by other scholarly methods (e.g. cognitive linguistics, lexical semantics, discourse analysis), as is the case for all ground-breaking (especially novel) text-critical and hermeneutical proposals.
- Second, it is not accurate to imply that social-scientific theory and practice have been around and active for only the past three decades or so (Rohrbaugh 2008:24). Sandys-Wunch lists a number of respected older scholars who utilised “the social sciences as a means of understanding the Bible” and suggests that “for the sake of their readers” modern critics “should lift their mortar boards to pay tribute to the admonitions of Ecclesiastes, who claimed that there was nothing new under the sun, as well as those of Jesus ben Sirach, who advised readers to praise famous men and our fathers who begat us” (2008:141).

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the power (ἐξουσία) of those who can overcome them. The Greek word can be translated [as] both authority (e.g. Matt 7:29, Jesus teaches with authority) and power (e.g. Matt 8:8, Jesus has power to heal a paralytic... Most translations consistently translate the word as authority” (Pilch 2008:106). The old Chewa formal correspondence translation does, in fact, use “authority” (lit. rulership, *ulamuliro*) in Mt 9:8, whereas the new popular language version has “power” (*mphamvu*).

- 4 For example, “The meanings that the writers of the New Testament exchanged with their contemporary audiences were rooted in the social systems that enveloped them” (Neufeld 2008a:1). Yes, but that was not the sole hermeneutical factor involved; there was at least one other conceptual system that provided an essential interpretive frame of reference for correcting, perceiving and construing NT texts (then and now), namely, the Old Testament (LXX) Scriptures and other popular Jewish-oriented religious literature of the age, oral (e.g. the Mishnah) as well as written.

- Finally, there is the issue of occasionally over-generalised technical terminology, for example, “Mediterranean anthropology,” which is “often used in this book”; such “[g]eneralizations can easily turn into a snare and a delusion, for they give the illusion of knowledge rather than its substance” (Sandys-Wunch 2008:142). This problem is both *geographical*, being too restricted as far as potential cultural influence on the diverse writings of Scripture are concerned, and also *chronological*, since considerable cultural change was manifested over the period of time during which the different books of the Hebrew canon in particular were composed.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, “to refer to Israelite culture as one of shame and honor,” is problematic because “[s]hame and honor exist in many cultures to the point that one would be hard-pressed to find a group devoid of these very human characteristics” (2008:143). A glossary of key social-scientific classificatory and analytical terms would have helped to alleviate some of these difficulties.

## 2. WHAT IS A “BIBLICAL TRANSLATION”?

In this section I will draw attention to several criticisms that arise in connection with the implicit claim of SSBT to deal (adequately) with the field of “biblical translation.” In the first place, there is a problem with the ambiguous nature of this designation in the book’s title: is the crucial qualifier “biblical” a *comparative* term, i.e. a translation like that found within the Bible, or *objective*, i.e. a translation of the Bible itself? Or do the included essays purport to investigate whether a particular translation is “biblical” in a *qualitative* sense, that is, acceptable according to some recognised scriptural norm, standard, or set of criteria? The editor’s “Introduction” (1-9) would seem to indicate that the second, most general sense is meant, but perhaps the third possibility (not discussed) is actually closer to what these essays intend to do. This is to expose the flaws of Bible translations that do not adopt a social-scientific approach, namely, “the role of anthropological concepts in interpreting the Bible”, and also fail to consider the potential “relationships of cultural power and dominance and subordination” (Neufeld 2008:2), which are inevitably

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5 The focus of the monograph under review is clearly the literature of the New Testament, but over a third of the biblical text references in the Index of Ancient Writings (Neufeld 2008b:171-178) is to Old Testament books as well as to those of the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

involved in the process of translating the Bible in different world settings.

But there is another misleading aspect about the title of this monograph. All of the essays deal exclusively with *English* Bible translations; versions in other languages are not considered at all, which is a significant limitation that should have been noted somewhere in the Introduction. Furthermore, there is an apparent edge in the critical evaluation of at least some of the essayists in that they wish to expose “the prevalent ethnocentrism common in Western translations” (Rohrbaugh 2008:11) and a “[r]eading [of] the Bible from a North American perspective [which] has emasculated it of its foreignness” (Neufeld 2008a:1). According to L. Venuti, such an adversarial approach “is highly desirable today, a *strategic* cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others” (1995:20, cited by Rohrbaugh 2008:14).<sup>6</sup> Is such strong rhetoric, bordering on the political, necessary to make one’s case?<sup>7</sup> Perhaps, but on the other hand it is strange, to say the least, that this forceful argument is made with sole reference to Bible translations in English, as if nothing else were going on in the field of translation in any other major (let alone “minor”) world language, not even French, Spanish, Portuguese or Chinese!

This inadequate perspective on Bible translation is further revealed in the overly limited scope of SSBT’s consideration of contemporary

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6 “Venuti’s brilliant but aggressively anti-Christian treatment leads him apparently to dismiss all functional-equivalent Bible translations as ‘imposing the English-language valorization of transparent discourse on every foreign culture’ (*The Translator’s Invisibility*, 21)” (Ellingworth 2007:322; cf. Rohrbaugh 2008:14).

7 Venuti can be even more acerbic in promoting his translation agenda as a form of “resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations” (1995:20). Translation strategy “is thus made to fit into the framework and context of late 20th century ethics, as seen from a specifically Anglo-American perspective” (Snell-Hornby 2006:146). As Stephen Pattemore observes: “[I]t is obvious that the main issues presented by Venuti’s critique are *ethical* rather than having to do with *translation theory*. Whether to produce foreignizing or domesticating translations is an ethical choice, as is the decision to produce a translation of the Bible at all” (2007:234, original italics).

practitioners and their works, whether theoretical or practical (i.e. “how to...”) in nature. The only Bible translation theorist seriously considered in this entire volume is E. A. Nida, and a critique of his “dynamic equivalence” approach is restricted to Rohrbaugh’s essay (see below). Even then, only a handful of Nida’s corpus of “over 40 books and more than 250 articles” (Porter 2005:6) is referred to, let alone meaningfully engaged with in the critical discussion. In fact, the critics might be surprised to learn that Nida’s view of the importance of culture in the process of interlingual communication is rather close to their own perspective, for example:<sup>8</sup>

It is not accommodation of ideas which is needed, but mutual comprehension. To accomplish this we must understand the real role of language and appreciate the significance of anthropological insights in the world views of others. ... Words only have meanings in terms of the culture of which they are a part. Language is a part of culture. Therefore, we have to understand the culture(s)...if we’re going to understand what the [biblical] writers were trying to say.

And Nida is just one of a host of more recent Bible translation theorists who have critically developed his functionalist approach as well as offered some new alternatives, and who could therefore have been consulted in order to fulfil the promise of this monograph’s title, e.g. Wilt (2003, “frames of reference”) and Gutt (2000, “relevance theory”).<sup>9</sup> It is indeed disappointing to observe how little the writers of these essays have done to familiarise themselves with current developments in the field and to confront or challenge these notions in their various applied studies of social-scientific theory, for example, with regard to the influential “semantic domain dictionary of Biblical Hebrew,” currently

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8 This quotation from Nida is found in Watt 2005:28. A more recent work of Nida that addresses some of the concerns of his critics with regard to sociocultural analysis is Nida (1996).

9 It would have been most informative, for example, for the contributors of SSBT to have read the recent encyclopaedic anthology giving “a history of Bible translation” edited by P. Noss (2007).

being produced under the direction of R. de Blois (see Wilt & Wendland 2008: Ch. 7).<sup>10</sup>

### 3. CAN A “FOREIGNIZING TRANSLATION” ALSO BE “FUNCTIONALLY EQUIVALENT”?

As we look more specifically, then, into Rohrbaugh’s essay on “foreignizing translation,” a rather notable lack of precision becomes immediately apparent. This manifests itself particularly in the categorical and indiscriminating manner in which the practice of contemporary Bible translation is described as well as evaluated (2008:11, italics added):

It has become a commonplace in New Testament studies to say that there are *two alternatives* when it comes to biblical translation: so-called literal or *formal correspondence* (between source language and target language) on the one hand, and functional, or *dynamic equivalence* on the other.

Since “neither [of these alternatives] addresses the issue of the cultural otherness of the Bible,” Rohrbaugh has an older alternative to propose, namely, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1813) metaphoric dichotomy representing the conceptual distance between a biblical author and his readers (2008:13-14, citing Venuti 1995:20):

In my opinion there are only two [roads open to the translator]: Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him.

Rohrbaugh adds: “In other words, it is simply a question of who is going abroad, the author or his reader” (2008:14). However, as most Bible translation theorists and practitioners nowadays know from personal experience, this issue is never “simple” in terms of either planning a new project or successfully implementing it,<sup>11</sup> that is, in view of the main

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10 For further information on this project, which applies cognitive linguistic theory to biblical Hebrew lexicography, see the project website at <http://www.sdbh.org/>; cf. also de Blois (2000).

11 For example, an experienced Bible translator, consultant and commentator, J. Ellington, exposes the fallacy of “Schleiermacher’s false dilemma” as follows: “Any attempt by translators to take the reader all the way to the writer is

target audience, primary communicative purpose (*Skopos*), and guiding job commission (*Brief*).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, they recognise that the reality for most project organisers is much more complicated than this seemingly straightforward *either-or* scenario. Rather, the challenge is to carefully investigate the specific nature of the “translation continuum” which presents itself in a given cultural setting and sociolinguistic set of circumstances and in the light of this to organise one’s programme by means of extensive education and communal “negotiation” (cf. Wendland 2004:88-90; Wilt & Wendland 2008: Ch. 4).

Rohrbaugh rightly draws attention to the difficulties inherent in the expressed aim of Nida and Taber’s “dynamic equivalence approach” (1969), namely, to generate “a response in the reader of the translation similar to that produced in a reader of the original language” (2008:12). The inadequacy of this perspective has been pointed out by Bible translation theorists for many years already – so much so that it is generally no longer even referred to (cf. Pattemore 2007:219-222). However, Rohrbaugh does not seem to appreciate the modifications made in Nida’s later work, for example, the distinction between “dynamic equivalence” and “functional equivalence” (viz. “functional *or* dynamic equivalence,” 2008:11, italics added). The latter method is based upon a more sophisticated and nuanced “sociosemiotic approach to the meaning of verbal signs [which] always involves the total communication of an event within the social context” (de Waard and Nida 1986:73, 36):

An expression in any language consists of a set of forms which serve to signal meaning on various levels: lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical. The translator must seek to employ a functionally

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doomed to frustrate and alienate the average reader. Yet any endeavor to take the writer all the way to the reader risks trivializing the message and creating disinterest” (2003:217; cited in Ellingworth 2007:310). Ellingworth later illustrates the point with this pair of diverse examples (2007:322): “...whether to transliterate βαπτίζω or to translate it, and whether to render ἀνάκειμαι as ‘recline’ or ‘sit’ in cultures where one sits at table to eat.”

12 The technical terms *Skopos* and *Brief* and their definitions, which I have adopted, come from the functionalist school of translation, popularised by C. Nord (e.g. 1997; cf. Wendland 2004:50-53).

equivalent set of forms which in so far as possible will match the meaning of the original source language text.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, not only the *affective* function of communication is investigated and assessed in translation, as implied in a dynamic equivalence approach, but all of the “communicative goals” that may be clearly identified in the source-language message, e.g. informative, expressive, textual, artistic, etc. (Wilt 2003:60; cf. Wendland 2004:310), or to take this principle to a more specific level of analysis, all of the pragmatically-motivated “speech acts” (*illocution – locution – perlocution*) that are manifested in the biblical document at hand (Wendland 2004:214-224). A “functionally-equivalent” methodology, then, as enriched by a “frames of reference” cognitive perspective (Wilt 2003:74-80; Wilt & Wendland 2008),<sup>14</sup> would seek to reproduce the distinctive function-marking forms (stylistic signals, “communicative clues”)<sup>15</sup> of the original text by using corresponding forms in the target language that are linguistically natural and appropriate for the genre concerned (e.g. narrative, lyric, prophetic, epistolary, etc. discourse).

It should be pointed out that Rohrbaugh’s trenchant critique of contemporary “biblical translating” is not limited to Nidan “dynamic

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13 Various “rhetorical processes” (or stylistic techniques), like repetition, compaction, rhythmic composition, etc., are employed in a given language “[t]o accomplish the rhetorical functions of wholeness, aesthetic appeal, impact, appropriateness, coherence, progression-cohesion, focus, and emphasis...” (de Waard and Nida 1986:86).

14 The “frames of reference” model offers a more extensive and Bible translation-specific conceptual structure than the “scenario theory” proposed by Rohrbaugh (2008:14-15). In this respect, too, Bible translation theorists have moved significantly beyond the “propositional model” that he alleges underlies the methods of dynamic equivalence as well as formal correspondence (2008:14). Thus, five major overlapping and integrated cognitive frames of reference are posited: sociocultural, organisational, conversational, textual and lexical (Wilt & Wendland 2008: Chs. 1-7), and these in turn may be further differentiated, e.g. sociolinguistic frames, or “schemas,” into scripts (dialogue types), scenarios (event sequences), and sketches (character/object profiles) (Wendland 2006:19-22).

15 Within the framework of “relevance theory, “[t]he linguistic properties of the source text functioned as communicative clues from which the original readers could infer the author’s intended meaning” (Smith 2002:110, italics added[no italics indicated]).



Mediterranean world” (2008:20): He provides an excellent social-scientific study of this concept and concludes (2008:22):

[S]tigmatization and ostracism from the community of other women were all too often the childless woman’s lot. The worst part of it was the public humiliation, regularly understood as the action of God. ... In an honor-shame society such as ancient Israel, the consequences of such humiliation could be a heavy burden, frequently affecting an entire extended family. All would share in the shame visited upon their barren relative.

Now an African audience or readership could understand such a concept and appreciate its deep social (even religious) implications much more readily than an American one, simply because of cultural proximity, including many (but certainly not all) aspects of the notion of “honor” and “shame.”<sup>17</sup> But the point is: to what extent does any translation *per se* evoke the desired “reading scenario,” or conceptual frame of reference? With respect to the term  $\sigma\tau\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\rho\alpha$ , Rohrbaugh does not really have much to offer in terms of a “foreignizing translation”, other than the traditional KJV/RSV’s “barren.” To be sure, the Scholars Version’s rendering “infertile” may be well off the mark,<sup>18</sup> but to label this “an egregiously domesticating translation” (2008:22) seems to be going too far. It imputes a “disturbing” motive to the *Jesus Seminar*, who have apparently allied themselves with Nida in some sort of conspiracy to “domesticate” the English-speaking world through the application of a translation technique in which readability is the “final sense of every sentence”, coupled with the desire to match “the colloquial quality of the original

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17 “Simply stated, honor is public reputation. It is name or place. It is one’s status or standing in the village together with the public recognition of it. Public recognition is all-important. ... [H]onor is at the center of a wide network of related values: ‘power, wealth, magnanimity, personal loyalty, precedence, sense of shame, fame or reputation, courage, and excellence’” (Rohrbaugh 2007:32, citing Paul Friedrich).

18 Rohrbaugh regards “infertile” as being “a modern medical term” that conjures up (for the Western reader) “pictures of medical counseling, infertility clinics, and the like” and “nothing like that engendered in the minds of ancient women” (2008:22). One wonders in what specific respects this admittedly erroneous mental scenario would differ from that evoked in the modern mind by “barren.” Many such issues may well be a function of culture, having little if anything to do with language at all.

Greek, capturing if possible the ‘tone and tenor of the original’” (Rohrbaugh 2008:23, citing Funk and Hoover 1993:xvi).

As suggested above, the major problem that all translators face is that no translation – whether literal, idiomatic or “foreignized” – can *in and of itself* accomplish the ambitious goal that Rohrbaugh has set for it, namely, to stage “an alien reading experience as a means of *preserving the cultural otherness* of the original text” (2008:14, added italics). All it can do is to draw attention to the “*linguistic otherness*” of the biblical text – and at such points to thereby verbally signal to readers (hearers) that they must turn to *other sources* in order to access the conceptual background necessary in order to better understand the setting-specific sociocultural and religious implications of the author’s intended message. So why is this the case – what’s the great difficulty here? Rohrbaugh himself puts his finger on the problem, at least in terms of one modern readership: “[It is] the near total inability of persons in American churches to distinguish between biblical values and American values” (2008:14).<sup>19</sup>

One possible solution for this problem, apparently not perceived by Rohrbaugh or mentioned by any of the other essayists of SSBH, is proposed by the writer of its concluding response, in the final sentence of this monograph (Wunch-Sandys 2008:146):

All I can conclude is that it is not possible to render the Bible into modern English in a way that we as products of our culture can understand without the sort of explanation that should accompany any honest translation that is willing to admit its inadequacies.

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19 The same difficulty is true in the traditional as well as modern African churches that I have researched over the years. With respect to the Tonga people of southern Zambia, for example: “Paul’s reference to ‘the inheritance of the saints’ (Eph 1:18)...is very likely to be distorted by ambivalent notions regarding traditional ‘inheritance’ (*lukono*) customs and beliefs, including their modern-day abuses with regard to widows, e.g. ritual ‘cleansing’ procedures, ‘levirate’ marriage, and devastating property-grabbing practices. This lack of an adequate or accurate biblical perspective is probably the greatest barrier that confronts contemporary receptors in their efforts to comprehend Paul’s various references to the ‘powers’ in Ephesians” (Wendland & Hachibamba 2007:237).

Thus, any text without a context is a pretext; in other words, a Bible translation (of any type) that fails to provide adequate contextual supplementation in the form of individual book introductions, sectional headings and/or summaries, explanatory notes, cross-references, maps, tables, a glossary and so forth gives readers the all-too-ready “excuse” to interpret the text as it stands, on the basis of their own limited understanding and from the biased perspective of their own world-view and value system.<sup>20</sup> It is no wonder, then, that *non*-understanding and all sorts of *mis*-understanding are bound to result. The original message in its overall setting of communication is, in reality, too “foreignized” to be readily and correctly retrieved by modern readers. In short, it is too much to expect translators to “choose terminology that will evoke scenarios in Anglo-American [or African] minds that are something like those that would have come to the minds of ancient Mediterranean readers” (Rohrbaugh 2008:15).

This is not to say that we must therefore give up on our efforts to provide our diverse target audiences with the most precise and accurate renderings possible. If a less-than-idiomatic (“foreignized”) wording is necessary to achieve this on occasion, to lexically signify the intended meaning in a more satisfactory manner, then that is what must be done. My point is simply that this would not necessarily contradict the general principle of functional equivalence, which is concerned not only with semantics, but also with the pragmatics of the biblical text, including its formal qualities that embrace artistry and rhetoric – beauty, feeling, impact, appeal. Thus, a carefully balanced, situation-sensitive approach is necessary, for as was just mentioned, one cannot accomplish everything in the translated text on its own. It all depends on the primary target group envisaged and the principal use that is intended for the version under preparation (Wilt & Wendland 2008: Ch. 5; Wendland 2006: Ch. 7). Pattemore provides an insightful summary that offers a current theoretical perspective on intercultural communication (missing in SSBT!), which might in turn serve as a guide when carrying out Bible translation programmes, not only in English, but in any other world language and setting (2008:259; cf. Wendland 2006:68-70):

Gutt’s approach [“relevance theory”] is not really a retreat into ‘literal’ translation, but...in fact, it requires an essentially

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20 Use of these text-elucidating auxiliary devices, of course, presupposes a reading target group. Different techniques would be required for a listening audience, e.g. sound effects to signal a “vocal note.”

functional-equivalent approach to the translated text, since the requirement of ‘direct translation’ is not that the chosen stimulus should resemble the source stimulus in its linguistic properties, but...it should have complete interpretive resemblance; it should produce the same cognitive effects [based on the provision of a sufficient supply of accurate information] when interpreted within the same context. On the other hand, Gutt’s direct translation remains conservative about how much of the context should or can be incorporated into the text itself.<sup>21</sup>

Rohrbaugh and his colleagues give a number of examples of alternative renderings that may (some cases are debatable) more accurately express the contextually-coloured sense of the biblical text in the English language. The question is whether these insights require a new translation method, i.e. a “foreignizing translation,” or whether they can, as suggested above, be accommodated within a “functional equivalence” approach that is enhanced by the communicative model involving intertwined “frames of reference” and founded on the cognitive perspective of “relevance theory”.<sup>22</sup> The latter option seems more

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21 Smith provides a complementing relevance theoretic summary (2002:110-111; my comment is in brackets): “[A] translation must retain all the communicative clues of the original. ... Their value lies not in their intrinsic form, but in their communicative function. Due to the structural differences between languages, it is not possible to reproduce the linguistic properties of one language in another. However, it is often possible to identify the communicative clues of the source text and formulate receptor language equivalents that serve the same communicative function. This approach is inherently similar to that of functional equivalence, which also treats the linguistic components of the source text from a functional perspective. The emphasis relevance theory places on keeping processing effort to a minimum means the reformulated communicative clues [including now any and all ‘foreignizing elements’ necessary] must be natural to the idiom of the receptor language.”

22 The question also depends on how far Rohrbaugh wishes to take his “foreignizing” procedures. Dealing with culturally distinctive key terms is one thing, but if he wants to include also the “linguistic difference” of the biblical text (2008:13), then he has clearly opted for a more or less literal version. Rohrbaugh does not state whether he has fully adopted Venuti’s campaign to increase the “translator’s visibility through foreignation (sic), as by using archaic terms or idiosyncratic word-order that preserve the ‘foreignness’ of the

reasonable and justified by the data that is provided in SSBT. Why, for example, could Rohrbaugh's proposed "culturally accurate translation", "You judge according to physical appearance" in John 8:15 (ὕμεις κατὰ τὴν σάρκα κρίνετε) (2008:19; cf. *New American Bible*) not also be considered as the closest functional equivalent?<sup>23</sup>

With regard to the translation of μνηστευθείσης in Matt 1:18, Rohrbaugh (2008:17) objects to the "ethnocentric violence" that he perceives in the "domesticated" term "engaged," which is used in the NRSV and some other modern English versions.<sup>24</sup> Realising that the older verb "betrothed" (RSV) will not be readily understood by most contemporary English speakers, he offers "a foreignizing translation instead," namely, "contractually bound to marry" (2008:18; cf. אָרשׁ in 2 Sam 3:14), thus: "Mary and Joseph *being contractually bound to marry*, yet before they came together..." (italics added). In this case, one might argue that the NIV's "pledged to be married" gets the same idea across in more natural English and is therefore a better rendering in view of the intended readership.<sup>25</sup> The point is that one's admirable efforts to

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source text (whether this really produces the desired effect is another issue)" (Snell-Hornby 2006:146).

- 23 In fact, considering the pragmatic "information structure" of this utterance, a more precise rendering would be: "It is according to physical appearance that you judge, but..." – which better expresses the focusing effect of the Greek word order.
- 24 "[T]hese translators invite us to conjure up American practices of self-initiated romantic attachment and an agreement between a couple that they will be married at some time in the future. It sounds like Joseph had given Mary a ring!" (2008:17). Granted, the translators made have made an error of judgment here, but why accuse them of obviously doing "violence" to the translated text?
- 25 In either case, an explanatory footnote would be necessary to provide a cultural frame of reference for more fully understanding the translation, e.g. "[T]hough the Jews did distinguish engagement from marriage, the dissolution of an engagement was considered the equivalent of divorce, and an engaged woman whose husband-to-be had died was regarded as a widow. Consequently, any sexual relations between an engaged woman and another man was viewed as adultery, and the woman was punished accordingly" (from the UBS Paratext 6.2 version of the Translator's Handbook of Matthew). Such a note would also be required in many African societies, where traditional marriage is also parentally arranged and viewed as "an arrangement between two extended

represent in a given target language key biblical terms and phrases in a way that more *accurately* conveys their culturally-shaped meaning, as “foreign” as this might be to the modern reader, do not necessarily conflict, as a general rule, with the desire to do this in an *idiomatic*, functionally equivalent manner with respect to their verbal form of expression.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. A FINAL CASE STUDY – “COVENANT” (בְּרִית)

Reflecting the predominant emphasis in current social-scientific studies relating to Scripture, most of the essays in SSBT focus on *New Testament* terms and texts. It might be useful, therefore, to overview an independent example from the Old (Hebrew) Testament as a way of further exploring some of the comments and criticisms presented above. Among the more difficult key terms of the Bible to translate in a Bantu setting (and in many others as well) is the Hebrew term בְּרִית, normally rendered in English as “covenant.” The basic reason for this difficulty relates to fundamental differences between biblical Hebrew and contemporary Chewa, for example, spoken in much of south central Africa, with respect to their respective cultures, worldviews, and language systems. How is it possible, then, to adequately communicate, via translation, such a significant concept, for example, in chapter 26 of Leviticus, which not only manifests a high concentration of occurrences of בְּרִית, but which

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families that involved the transfer of property rights, inheritance rights, rights over children, and sexual rights” (Rohrbaugh 2008:17). However, a “betrothal” (e.g. the idiom *kufunsidwa mbeta lit.* ‘to be asked [as] an unmarried [young] woman’, used in Chewa) is not regarded as being equivalent to “marriage,” which is an extended process that becomes complete only after the full “bridal compensation” has been paid to the woman’s parents and a child has been born. If a woman became pregnant by another man before the wedding ceremony, a stiff fine would have to be paid by the male violator and the “betrothal” could be cancelled, but this is not equivalent to being “divorced,” as in the ANE setting.

- 26 The difficulty of carrying out this process is significantly increased in non-Western language cultures that do not have a long tradition of Bible translation or a corpus of versions, commentaries, and study tools to choose from. In these settings, a greater degree of “domestication” is normally required in order to communicate on any level, whether in a “liturgical” version suitable for public worship or a “popular language” edition intended for widespread lay usage (cf. Wendland 2004: Ch. 10).

“is linked, covenantally, to the preceding chapter, to the second half of Leviticus, to the Sinai covenant narrative, to the rest of the Old Testament canon and also to the New Testament” (Foster 2005:177)?

The first step in such an interlinguistic, cross-cultural analysis, of course, is to study the key term in its original setting of usage. After a thorough lexical, sociological and worldview-oriented (i.e. “social-scientific,” though he does not call it that) investigation of בְּרִית in biblical Hebrew, Foster argues for “a complex definition of בְּרִית, ‘covenant’ in its ANE context” as a deliberately chosen (i.e. not effected by birth) formal relationship involving mutual obligations that are guaranteed by severe oath sanctions (2005:177). Furthermore, with regard to the many covenantal concepts in the Old Testament, “[t]he covenant structure highlights relationship with Yahweh and exclusivity, security, accountability and purpose within that relationship” (2005:99). The second step in the translation process is to carry out a corresponding ethnographic and linguistic study of all terms that are somehow related to the concept of “covenant” in the target language. This must be done with reference to the traditional, pre-Christian understanding and application of these words (e.g. in the ancient oral “literature” of the people – proverbs, folktales, songs, etc.) as well as their usage in modern parlance, including Christian religious literature and settings (public worship, crusades, Bible studies, etc.). Here, then, is where some significant cognitive and semantic gaps begin to appear, as in the case of Foster’s research among the Lomwe of Mozambique, which reveals, for example, that “[t]raditional Lomwe social structure does not have adequate parallels or analogies to ANE covenant concepts,” and that “there are significant gaps between worldviews of Leviticus 26 and of Lomwe-speaking Christians, particularly with regard to the variables of *Space* and *Causality*” (2005:144, original italics).

The final stage in the translation process entails the selection, evaluation and testing of possible translation equivalents. The Chewa people of Malawi and Zambia are closely related linguistically and culturally to the Lomwe, and therefore translators face similar “challenges for communicating Old Testament covenant concepts” (Foster 2005:144), particularly with respect to the relative *formality* of the arrangement and the associated “*oath* sanctions” that are involved, whether explicitly or implicitly, in the original cultural-religious setting. Thus, no matter what Chewa expression is used to render בְּרִית, it will always have to be accompanied by an extensive explicatory note, or in this case, due to the frequency and importance of the term, a separate

*glossary* entry. In both the old formal correspondence translation and the recent, popular-language version, the word *chipangano* has been used fairly consistently (more so in the former than the latter version). This noun is based on the verb *-pangana* to “make a pact, contract, or agreement with someone (person or group).” Obviously, this term leaves a lot to be desired from the biblical perspective, especially since God (YHWH) is the principal initiator and “major partner” of most covenant-making according to both OT and NT (διαθήκη) usage.

In this case, as far as English is concerned, the high-register term “covenant” (most major translations, as opposed to “agreement,” e.g. CEV) is probably “foreignized” sufficiently so as to “signify the linguistic and cultural difference” of the biblical text (Rohrbaugh 2008:13).<sup>27</sup> It is arguably also the most “functionally equivalent” rendering, that is, for a majority of “evangelical” church-going folk – but perhaps not for some other target audience, e.g. an inner-city youth group. However, finding a more appropriate translation in Chewa is more difficult since most Bible-users have already accepted the traditional term *chipangano*, which is formally *familiar* (i.e. in normal, everyday sociolinguistic usage), but then often *misunderstood* in typical settings of Christian religious discourse. So how could we “foreignize” this rendering appropriately so as to defamiliarise the reading experience somewhat and thereby draw the reader into a search for contextual “relevance” (Pattimore 2008:252), particularly in passages that feature an initial occurrence of “covenant” (e.g. Lev 26:9)?<sup>28</sup> My preliminary research indicates that an addition of the qualifier *chalumbiro* “of an oath/vow” might accomplish this without violating Chewa stylistic norms. In other words, this verbally “marked” expression would function as a “contextual clue” for the reader/hearer, suggesting that the phrase “vowed agreement” requires further elucidation for fuller understanding,

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27 The sociolinguistic register of vocabulary in view of the principal target audience is another factor of prime importance in functional equivalence translating (cf. Wendland 2004:278, 294, 296), but one that is not seriously considered in the various essays of SSBT, e.g. the suggested renderings of “benefaction, beneficence, even favor” for *χάρις*, e.g. in Gal 2:9 (Crook 2008:38).

28 Presumably, a biblical concept that is “foreignized” by means of a longer expression in a given target language would not require its full representation on every occurrence, e.g. “the degraded poor” and “the greedy rich” in James (Batten 2008:65; assuming that these “foreignized” renderings are accurate).

such as via an explanation provided in a marginal note or glossary entry (e.g. what kind of “vow”, why vowed, what punitive consequences for violators?).

Thus, Rohrbaugh’s recommended procedure of formally “flagging” (or *foreignizing*) a TL term in the interest of greater accuracy with respect to the culturally-based sense of a certain biblical concept is a valid translation procedure. I have simply tried to point out that the overall process is considerably more complicated than he (or Venuti) seems to appreciate with their *trip* metaphor, that is, whom to “send...travelling”, the author or the reader (2008:14).<sup>29</sup> Rather, it depends on a number of other important translation principles (e.g. contextual consistency versus stability in key word usage) that must be negotiated by all parties concerned in view of the wider project job commission, sociocultural setting, translation history, and immediate as well as long-term communicative goals.

##### 5. CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

Apart from his relatively uninformed critique of Bible translation theory and practice, Rohrbaugh’s objections to overly or poorly “domesticated” translations are quite legitimate, as are the related concerns expressed in many of the other essays contained in SSBT. Certainly we do not wish “unwittingly to go on creating biblical messages in our own domestic image” (2008:24). So if “[t]he question then becomes one of deciding whether this matters” (2008:23), most, if not all, Bible translators and consultants would answer, *Indeed, it does matter!* However, my study has also shown that Rohrbaugh’s proposed solution is rather simplistic and misleadingly one-sided. It is not merely a matter of deciding “who it is we are going to send abroad: the author or the reader,” nor is it correct to conclude that “sending the reader abroad would seem to be the sine qua non of accurate translation” (2008:23). Modern translation practice is much more refined and discriminating than that, and its practitioners have a broad range of alternatives to consider nowadays when preparing a translation and its essential paratextual supplementation for a particular target language community.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, it is a gross overstatement to

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29 “For the cross-cultural communication of today, Schleiermacher’s maxim, which was used for the scholars of the time with reference to translating from Classical Antiquity, is simply inadequate” (Snell-Hornby 2006:147).

30 Wunch-Sandys offers an important caveat in this regard (2008:145, material in brackets added): “Essentially what is in play here is the distinction between the

claim that “English fluency almost always involves domestication” (2008:23), that is, in the Venutian sense of “masquerade[ing] as true semantic equivalence” and masking “the very difference that translation is called on to convey” (Venuti 1998:21).<sup>31</sup> Such a sweeping accusation betrays a lack of awareness of the more nuanced perspective on the nature of Bible translation that many contemporary practitioners have adopted along with the contextually-determined range of stylistic options that are available to them nowadays, whether in English or any other language.

The notion of a “foreignizing” type of Bible translation has been shown to be valid in one sense, but invalid in two other respects. It is suitable as a synonym for a “marked,” or “defamiliarised,” target-language rendering which distinctively, yet also accurately, reflects some special literary form, source-language meaning, and/or pragmatic function that is clearly manifested in the original text. On the other hand, it is out of place as a label for a *completely new* type of translation, especially a stand-alone version which does not utilise any of the auxiliary helps available for “contextualising” a TL in order to provide a conceptual framework that evokes a closer approximation of the intended sense of some important biblical expression (in its context). It is also disingenuous to employ “foreignizing” as a cover term to designate any sort of translation technique that is exclusively “designed to jar the reader with an alien reading experience...staged by the translator in order to convey source-language values and perceptions that readable English cannot” (Rohrbaugh 2008:23). No translation, on its own, can accomplish such a feat, and it is illusory to claim that it can.

But my issues with the application of an indiscriminate “foreignizing” approach to Bible translation aside, there is no doubt that readers will benefit in different ways from Neufeld’s collection of social-scientific

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limits of translation and the function of a commentary. Keeping these two different activities clearly distinguished might help to preserve a scholar’s [and translator’s!] integrity. For example, if one is to take the suggestion that given the cultural background of the status of the rich, one should render ‘rich’ as ‘greedy rich’ [cf. Batten 2008:76], then it follows that one should translate Matt 27:57 as ‘Joseph, a greedy rich man from Aramathea...’.

31 “[D]espite his own theory, Venuti has as it were subjected Schleiermacher’s notions to an ethnocentric reduction (or cannibalization?) and – as a translator all too visible – ‘domesticated’ them to suit the Anglo-American planetary consciousness of the outgoing 20th century” (Snell-Hornby 2006:147).

case studies. One only wishes that there had been more concrete discussion (pros and cons) of some of the English translation options available for the various problem areas considered in this monograph. In any case, these challenging essays provide many Scripture-based insights and much concrete evidence from the ancient Mediterranean world to support the following conclusion (Neufeld 2008:3-4):<sup>32</sup>

Language cannot be isolated from the social context or world in which it is embedded. Thus, when seeking to transport the meaning of words and sentences from one language to another, the translator cannot simply search for word equivalents in the target language to render the meaning of the source. The translator must attend to the cultural and social context of the ancient Mediterranean world from within which the words and sentences arise. ... Translation then becomes an act of cross-cultural transfer where the translator must be both bicultural as well as bilingual.

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32 Although expressed in terms reflecting the outmoded conduit metaphor of translation (cf. Wilt 2003:7-8, 39), the point being made here is still valid and worthy of note by all contemporary Bible translators, reviewers and consultants.

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