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EXPLORING TRANSLATION THEORIES – A REVIEW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BIBLE TRANSLATION

ABSTRACT

This review article is written with reference to the recent book by Anthony Pym entitled “Exploring Translation Theories” (2010). In my descriptive evaluation, I progressively work through the text, pointing out areas of special interest and importance along the way, including occasional critical observations. I have carried out this analysis from the particular perspective of the theory and practice of Scripture translation, which not surprisingly does not receive a great deal of attention in Pym’s overview of the field of contemporary translation studies. This is a significant work and one that undoubtedly will be referenced a great deal in the months to come. Hence, a more detailed reflection and application from the specific viewpoint of “Bible translation studies” is necessary.¹

1. OVERVIEW

Anthony Pym, a world-recognized translation theorist, critic, and educator, helpfully summarizes the primary goal and audience for his book at the beginning of its Preface:

This is a course on the main paradigms of Western translation theories since the 1960s. ... The course is not designed to make anyone a better translator;² it is mainly for academic work at advanced levels, although it should be accessible to anyone interested in how the theories invite debate (xi).

In the first chapter, Pym surveys the various theory-related topics that he will consider in this book. But first he must answer a crucial question of definition: “What is a translation theory?” Pym does not explicitly define the key term “theory,” but seems to assume a typical meaning like “a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something ... based on general principles” (Soanes & Stevenson 2006:1495), or more simply,

1 This review is thoroughly embedded within the particular frame of reference of Bible translation and a life devoted to its practice. Such an admittedly narrow perspective must therefore be taken into account when considering my personal comments and criticisms along the way.

2 One might suggest here that being aware of different “theories” of translation (and how they work) would, in fact, make someone a better translator!

“a system of beliefs about reality” (Gutt 1992:7). A theory provides the conceptual framework in turn for a specific “generation and selection process” (1), which, in the case of translation, allows one to either generate a possible translation or to evaluate and select from among several credible options (“target texts”) in relation to a given “source text.”³ Translation (or “translating”) then may be defined as “a set of processes leading from one side (ST) to the other (TT)” (1), which is admittedly a “very spatial image” suggesting “that translations affect the target culture but not the source” (2). Perhaps this is literally correct when rendering documents from “dead languages,” as with the Scriptures, but certainly it is also true to say that modern Bible translation activities, along with related exegetical and various sociocultural studies, do affect our *understanding* of the source text and its context.⁴

In any case, Pym moves quickly from theory to “paradigm,” that is, a set of principles which underlies a particular group of theories, including “general ideas, relations, and principles for which there is internal coherence and a shared point of departure” (3). Pym prefers this broader perspective rather than to discuss “individual theories, theorists, or schools,” and thus he provides a “roughly chronological” overview and assessment of selected “paradigms based on equivalence, purposes, descriptions, uncertainty, localization, and, for want of a better term, cultural translation” (3). But why should we wish to “study translation theories” – or “paradigms” (Pym is somewhat equivocal in his usage here)? From the “generative” point of view, “a plurality of theories can widen the range of potential solutions that translators think of”;⁵ on the other hand, from a “selective” perspective, “theories can also provide a range of reasons for choosing one solution and discarding the rest, as well as defending that solution when necessary” (5).

In my opinion and with reference to the varied challenges of Bible translation, several of the later theories (or paradigms) that Pym discusses

3 Note that the terms “source language/text” (SL/T) and “target language/text” (TL/T) still seem to be current in secular translation studies, and therefore they will be used for convenience here. Unless otherwise stated, in the following discussion the numbers in parentheses refer to specific pages in Pym’s book.

4 Furthermore, from the perspective of the translator, the conceptual “motion,” or mental processing activity, must go in both directions, that is, continually back-and-forth between the ST and TT and their respective sociocultural settings.

5 Exegetes and commentators too can benefit from such a broader perspective, when communicating their various interpretations of the biblical text to others.

are not very helpful in terms of either “generation” or “selection.” However, readers are encouraged to work through the entire field for themselves and come to their own conclusion when evaluating his survey of a particular translation paradigm, his summary of its noteworthy “virtues,” and finally, some “frequently had arguments” against it, which is how each of his main chapters is organized. At the end of every chapter, a number of primary source texts and suggestions for further reading are given, along with some helpful “suggested projects and activities” to serve as engagement exercises. Pym proposes that the latter “should probably come at the beginning of a class, rather than be used as appendages at the end” (5) – the assumption being that his text is functioning as a sourcebook or lesson guide for a course on modern translation theory. As I attempt to summarize and/or react to some of the key insights of Pym’s valuable, but rather concentrated theoretical “exploration,” I will necessarily have to be selective, omitting certain key elements in his description or argument and focusing in particular on those issues that might be of special interest to Bible translation consultants, theorists, Scripture exegetes,⁶ and university-trained translators.

2. *EQUIVALENCE*

Pym devotes his first two content chapters to a thorough consideration of the foundational paradigm of “equivalence,” for which he makes a twofold distinction into the “natural” and “directed” sub-categories. But wait – why would Pym allocate so much space to such an “outmoded” model,⁷ one that has been roundly criticized by some prominent secular theorists and Bible translation specialists alike?⁸ The difficulty seems to

6 Scholars in theology and biblical studies can also benefit from some knowledge of translation studies since “translation is at the heart of intercultural communication, and ... the disciplinary knowledge of translation studies can challenge other disciplines in new directions” (Israel 2011) – including linguistic theory, language acquisition, and new multimodal means of communication.

7 This negative characterization of “equivalence” is found in the otherwise excellent book on “translating cultures” by D Katan (2004:171).

8 Pym cites in particular Snell-Hornby (1988) and Gutt (2000) (6, 35-37). According to Jeremy Munday (2009:185), “The concept of equivalence is one of the most controversial issues discussed in translation studies, where scholars disagree on its validity and usefulness”. Theorists (several named) “reject the notion more or less entirely,” whereas practitioners (several named)

be that although “equivalence is not a stable concept” (xi), no widely acceptable alternative notion has surfaced which is any better. Therefore, Pym organizes his presentation according to “[t]he basic idea ... that all the theories respond to the one central problem: translation can be defined by equivalence” (xi), and that “[o]nce you have grasped the basic principles of this sub-paradigm [i.e. natural equivalence], all the other paradigms can be seen as responses to it” (23).⁹ He justifies this decision in further detail by using an interesting analogy in the Postscript to his book:

What do I think of these paradigms? Equivalence, for me, is a social illusion but a necessary one. People believe in it just as they believe in the value of the money they carry in their pockets; we believe in these things even when we know there is no linguistic certainty behind equivalence and not enough gold to back up our money. We thus have to try to understand the way *equivalence beliefs* work. From that point, I can accept all the other paradigms as having valid things to say (165).

In this sense, equivalence becomes a convenient *frame of reference* from which we can carry out a discussion about translation – whether to endorse, criticize, modify, or elaborate upon this particular perspective on the work. So, until a substitute for this idealistic “gold standard” can be found,¹⁰ we (at least those of us who are actually engaged with active

“see it as a helpful tool in translation theory and teaching” (Munday 2009:185).

9 Young (2011:60) puts the case for equivalence this way: “[T]he epistemological and cultural differences embedded in the forms of different languages means that translation always involves transformation, it is not a transparent and exact process. It offers a process of equivalence, but the equivalent is never fully equivalent. Translation theory focuses on this paradoxical moment when translation makes the difference into the same, but a same which is at the same time different”. Munday (2008:49), too, concludes that “equivalence is an issue that will remain central to the practice of translation, even if it has been marginalized by some translation studies scholars”.

10 Even a recent review of book on translation by a professional (secular) translator unashamedly retains the notion of *equivalence*: “It will always be possible in a translation to find new relationships between sound and sense that are equivalently interesting, if not phonetically identical. Style, like a joke,

Bible translators and projects) may be stuck with the illusory criterion of “equivalence” for a while longer.¹¹ In the end, it may simply be true that “[e]quivalence is crucial to translation because it is the unique intertextual relation that only translations, among all conceivable text types, are expected to show” (Kenny 1998:80, citing U Stecconi).

2.1 *Natural Equivalence*

In his chapter on “natural equivalence” (chapter two),¹² Pym first sets about defining this “unpopular” notion (7), defending it in the process from those who feel that it may (or should) be done away with in translation studies. This paradigm is based on “the idea that what we say in one language *can* have the same value (the same worth or function) when it is translated into another language. The relation between the source text and the translation is then one of equivalence (‘equal value’), no matter whether the relation is at the level of form, function, or anything in between” (6). For example, in English-speaking cultures Friday the 13th is popularly considered to be an “unlucky day”; in Spanish, on the other hand, the functionally corresponding day is “Tuesday the 13th” (*martes 13*). Such equivalence is considered to be “natural” because it simply exists; it is not the result of any translation from English to Spanish, or vice-versa. In terms of reference these two expressions are not the same (Friday versus Tuesday); however with regard to function (i.e., attributed “bad luck”), they are. Pym mentions the familiar application of “naturalness” to Bible translation by Nida and Taber: “Translating consists in *reproducing* in the receptor language the *closest natural equivalent* of the source language message” (9). But he does not note Nida and Taber’s added prioritization, “*first* in terms of *meaning* and *secondly* in terms of *style*,” that is, linguistic form (Nida and Taber 1969:12, emphasis added.)

just needs the talented discovery of equivalents. ... In a translation, as any art form, the search is for an equivalent sign” (Thirlwell 2011:22, in review of Bellos 2011).

- 11 “Once its moorings to equivalence have been severed, ‘translation’ risks becoming a drunken boat” (159) – one (*I might add*) that is driven to and fro on the seas of meaning by the winds of personal opinion, caprice, or concerns that may have nothing at all to do with the original ST. For several examples, see the “Inaugural Issue” of the new journal *Translation* (September 2011).
- 12 This category is treated implicitly under the “translation shift approach” by Munday (2008:60-62, 66-68).

Equivalence theorists developed a number of linguistic distinctions to show that, while equivalence could not be demonstrated on the level of world-view, as some early structuralists claimed (e.g. Humboldt, Sapir, Whorf), this could be done with respect to more delimited segments of language, for example, within spoken *parole* as distinct from systemic *langue* (Saussure), on specified linguistic “text levels” (Catford), through the “componential analysis” of lexical items (Nida) (10-11), or with respect to “pragmatic discourse conventions and modes of text organization” (Hatim & Mason) (19).¹³ Elaborate lists and procedures for identifying instances of natural equivalence and for attempting to maintain these in translation were developed, for example on the lexical level, through the use of a loanword, calque, literal rendition, transposition, modulation, correspondence (true “equivalence”), or adaptation (13). On the sentence level then, one could implement standard translation procedures such as amplification, reduction, explicitation, implicitation, generalization, particularization, or compensation (14-15).¹⁴ But as Pym points out, in the application of many of these techniques, the result is not really “natural” equivalence, but rather “directional” equivalence, for the corresponding expressions are not necessarily reversible, e.g. the German rendering *eine der englischen Eliteschulen* with reference to the well-known British “Eton.” So despite the “illusory and deceptive” character of natural equivalence and its detailed modes of analysis, Pym feels that this approach and its metalinguistic terminology “must be known and understood, even though different theories tend to use the same terms in slightly different ways”

13 In this connection, Pym asserts that theories of natural equivalence “mostly assume that there is a piece of reality or thought (a referent, a function, a message) that stands outside of language and to which two languages can refer. That thing would be a third element of comparison, a *tertium comparionis*, available to both sides” (18). This mediating conceptual element seems to reflect the more rudimentary “transfer stage” of dynamic equivalence theory (Nida & Taber 1969:33).

14 All these procedures are taken from Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1972). In this section Pym also briefly mentions other equivalence-oriented techniques, such as “reference to a *tertium comparionis*,” “deverbalizing” (*théorie du sens*), and the applied linguistic discourse analysis methodology of Hatim and Mason (18-19).

(23). This methodology is especially helpful in the training of translators at an elementary level (20).¹⁵

2.2 *Directional Equivalence*

Pym's first task in chapter three is to distinguish between "natural equivalence" (as discussed in chapter two) and "directional equivalence."¹⁶ Thus, "[d]irectional equivalence is an *asymmetric* relation where the creation of an equivalent by translating one way does not imply that the same equivalence is created when translating the other way" (26). On the other hand, "[t]he term 'natural equivalence' ... refers to theories that assume the possibility of an equally balanced two-way movement" (28). The methodology associated with natural equivalence typically generates manifold "categories of translation procedures," whereas a directional approach tends to favor "only two opposed poles" (25) that are commonly associated with two contrastive "ways of translating,"¹⁷ i.e. literal (formal correspondence) versus free (aiming to achieve semantic and/or functional equivalence).¹⁸

15 Arguments against the concept of natural equivalence in translation studies include the presupposition of a "non-existent symmetry" between languages, its lack of a verifiable "psychological basis," an underlying "imperialistic" agenda, and the promotion of "parochialism" that prefers meaning over form (20-21).

16 The directive equivalence approach is considered under the heading of "equivalence and equivalent effect" in Munday (2008:36-54).

17 Pym qualifies this as follows: "Although there are usually more than two ways of translating, the reduction to two is very much a part of the way translation has been seen in Western tradition" (26). A conceptual "frames of reference" approach seeks to break this "tradition" by investigating the various interacting contexts (cognitive, sociocultural, organizational, situational, and textual) that must be considered when planning, implementing, and assessing a given translation project, whether the *Skopos* is focused primarily on form or function (cf. Wendland 2008:1-7).

18 Chesterman (2005, as summarized by Pym [25-27]) expresses these relations in terms of different kinds of "similarity" coupled with differing perspectives: "Divergent similarity" is the viewpoint of the translator who creates a new TL text that is similar in certain significant respects to an original SL text (directional equivalence). "Convergent similarity," on the other hand, adopts the perspective of the receptors who tend to view the two texts, SL and TL, as being essentially the same for all practical purposes, i.e., a Bible translation *is* the Word of God (a significant instance of "natural equivalence").

I do not find Pym's argument to separate the two types of equivalence very convincing. To me, "natural" equivalence is at best simply a special case of "directional" equivalence since all true "translation" is directive in some sense, that is, proceeding from a given SL text to a TL text (though some theorists would argue against this; see below).¹⁹ One must always start somewhere, and that is with an originally composed text (or its translation), which one then wishes to communicate in another language as the ultimate goal, or finishing point. The fact that two words or expressions in different languages appear to be formally, semantically, and functionally inter-changeable, e.g. the rendering for "sun" (*dzuwa*) in Chewa with reference to the bright star in the daytime sky, is an exception which proves the rule – namely, that such instances of (relatively) complete equivalence are almost impossible to find, except between closely related language-cultures.²⁰ And even these seeming equivalents turn out to be deceptive or incomplete after one researches their respective conceptual "frames" (sociocultural settings, contexts of use, connotative overlays, etc.), which will always prove to be different in certain respects.²¹ In short, exact or total translation is impossible, to a

19 I find Pym's further distinction rather difficult to follow: "Theories of directional equivalence allow that the translator has a choice between several translation strategies, and that those strategies are not dictated by the source text" (26). In the first place, one may recall all the translation "procedures" (13) and "strategies" (17) that were summarized in the preceding chapter on natural equivalence. These diverse options must surely imply that a choice must be made among them in a given situation. Secondly, the expression "not dictated by the source text" is rather ambiguous if it is true that "[d]irectional equivalence can describe the way a translation represents its source text" (26).

20 Pym proposes "back-translation" as a test for distinguishing between natural and directional equivalence: "This means taking the translation and rendering it back into the source language, then comparing the two versions. When natural equivalence prevails, we can go from *Friday* to *viernes* then back to *Friday*, and it makes no difference which term is the source and which the translation. This is because the correspondence existed in some way prior to the act of translation" (30). But then he turns right around and admits that such "naturalness is certainly an illusion," a position that all *cognitive linguists* would support, and that "one could also argue, historically, that all equivalence is in some way directional" (30).

21 Thus, in contrast to English, the Chewa (a SE Bantu language) word for "sun," *dzuwa*, can be used in different contexts to refer to "daytime" (as distinct from

greater or lesser degree, depending on a host of circumstantial factors.²² In any case, Pym himself seems to come to the same conclusion, namely, that there is really not a significant difference which would separate theories of natural equivalence from those of directional equivalence:

According to the criteria of both directionality and naturalness, you go from one language to the other, and the result is a translation if and when a relationship of equivalence is established on some level (28).

Pym proceeds to point out the “directionality” involved in a number of representative definitions of equivalence, noting that “the term ‘equivalent’ describes one side only, the target side ... [since] translation goes from one side to the other, but not back again” (27-28). He then discusses the two “polarities of directional equivalence” as they are manifested in the writings of many translation theorists, for example, foreignizing- domesticating (Schliermacher), formal-dynamic (Nida), semantic-communicative (Newmark), overt-covert (House), documentary-instrumental (Nord), resistant-fluent (Venuti).²³ “The

the night), to the “time” of day, to a “hot day,” or to a period of “famine/drought.”

- 22 This is arguably true even in the “surer examples” of “one-to-one” or “total equivalence” (within “Kade’s types of equivalence”), such as “technical terms like the names of chemical elements” (29). These will normally turn out to be “loanwords” or pure transliterations in many languages, for example, “hydrogen” in Chewa – *haidologeni*. However, the latter term would be unknown to many more MT speakers than its apparent equivalent in English, even within a country like Zambia, where English is a “second language.” This factor of (un)familiarity renders the two expressions non-equivalent in terms of their comparative natural communicability.
- 23 The most recent expression of this polarity is presented from the perspective of the target constituency: “The *analytic* vis-a-vis *synthetic* distinction is to emphasize the cognitive process by which one uses the translation. The analytical translation enables the ‘reader’ to tear the text apart, to get at the details, to perform word studies, even to hear the underlying original language. Those processes are unique to intentional analysis. The synthetic translation enables the reader to process the text’s meaning [e.g. to readily summarize it], to follow the flow of the author’s thought, to engage in the narrative. Any analysis which is done in these synthetic processes happens subconsciously and automatically. With the synthetic, it’s like the analytical engine is hardwired in” (Sangrey 2012).

strategies they are talking about are not always the same, and some of the theorists have diametrically opposed preferences, but they are all talking in twos,” even though many allow for the fact that “there are possible modes between the two poles” (33). Pym then asks the question *why* – why “only two categories” (33)? In answer, he suggests that “there may be something profoundly binary within equivalence-based translation itself,”²⁴ and more significantly perhaps, “[i]t would certainly seem that the ideology of ‘one side or the other’ is deeply anchored in Western thought” (34). As a Westerner myself, I am not the one to evaluate the preceding assertion, but the notion of translation ideology is certainly worth exploring further from an interlingual, cross-cultural perspective.²⁵

3. *RELEVANCE THEORY*

Pym devotes several pages to the approach of “relevance theory” (RT), in particular, as applied by E-A Gutt in critique of various theories of equivalence with reference to Bible translation.²⁶ He attempts to summarize Gutt’s key distinction between an “indirect” and a “direct” translation. The former encompasses “all the kinds of translations that may be done without referring to the context of the source text”; the latter (direct) denotes “the kind that does refer to that context,” thus creating “a presumption of complete interpretive resemblance” (35).²⁷ However, this

24 It would seem that any translation theory (or paradigm) that considers a TT in relation to a ST should involve “binary” thinking to one degree or another.

25 “Clearly, in order to understand the scope of the cluster concept called *translation* in English, translation studies scholars must be assiduous in seeking out more of the world’s words for translation, as well as investigating in detail the connotations, implications, translation practices and actual histories of translation associated with those terms” (Tymoczko 2011:68-69). Perhaps some “thinking through translation with metaphors” (St. André 2010) will also be involved in these explorations. However, my initial reading of such metaphor research leads me to conclude that it often reveals more about the ideas and perspectives of the theorist than it does about the process of translation per se.

26 See also Munday (2009:60-61); Hatim (1998:182-183).

27 A direct translation allegedly stimulates within receptors the belief that they “understand what receivers of the original understood, and that belief is not dependent on any comparison of the linguistic details” (35). A recent workbook prepared for basic Bible translators valiantly seeks to clarify the notion of “direct translation” by describing it as a Scripture product that “aim[s] at high meaning resemblance,” that is, “keeping the ideas

characterization (if Pym has it right) raises certain questions: Can any credible translation “be done without referring to the context of the source text” at all? And does not every version presume to represent “complete interpretive resemblance” with respect to the original text? In any case, Pym’s subsequent conclusion may sound rather surprising:

Here the critique of natural equivalence (too many possible categories) brings us back to the two familiar categories (“direct” vs. “indirect”). Those two, we can now see, are very typical of directional equivalence. *That alone could justify Gutt as a theorist of equivalence* (35, italics added).

Relevance theorists might not agree with Pym’s assessment here, but I must leave it to them to set the record straight in this regard.²⁸

Pym goes on to consider the importance of “implicature” in communication, that is, what is conveyed directly by the linguistic forms of a text, as distinct from what is conveyed implicitly by these same words and sentences “interacting with a specific context” (35). Grice’s familiar four “maxims” are summarized (i.e. quantity, quality, relevance, and manner) along with Sperber and Wilson’s reduction of them to one, the pragmatic principle of relevance, thus “saying in fact that all meaning is produced by the relation between language and context” (36). In the case of a translation, if the receptors are sufficiently familiar with the biblical context, then a more formally correspondent (i.e. “direct”) rendering can be successful. If not, then a more functional (i.e. “indirect”) translation will need to be undertaken, one that clarifies the intended implicatures of the original (e.g. stating certain implicit information explicitly in the text).²⁹ And what is Pym’s conclusion?

communicated by the translation as similar to the ideas communicated by the original as possible,” a process which “requires that the audience learn the intended content to be able to understand” (Hill et al. 2011:125). I suspect that it would also help one’s understanding of such a “documentary” version (Nord 1997:47-48) to know as much as possible about how to interpret the linguistic and literary forms of the biblical text as well.

28 To begin with, how different is the concept of “interpretive resemblance” (cf. Gutt 1992:65-66) from that of “equivalence.” In any case, I would refer readers to S Pattemore’s helpful overview of some of the issues involved concerning RT in relation to current translation theory in UBS circles (2007).

29 The problem of how to handle “implicit information” in translation is actually quite a bit more complicated than this. It also involves fundamental (“deep-level”) cognitive issues such as primary world-view orientations and value

The notion of implicature can thus give us two kinds of equivalence, in keeping with two kinds of translation. The fundamental dichotomy of directional equivalence persists.³⁰

(36)

Gutt's abstract theoretical point, however, appears to be valid, that the concept of equivalence "operates more on the level of beliefs" and therefore "[t]ranslations, when they are accepted as such, do indeed create a 'presumption of complete interpretive resemblance'," that is, for a given target audience (37).³¹ "Equivalence is always 'presumed' equivalence and nothing more" (37). The question then is, how important is it to retain this potentially illusionary "presumption" in translation theory and, more importantly, as a pedagogical tool in translation practice as well?

If equivalence is not an "efficient" theoretical concept, then what could replace it? How about the notion of "similarity"? Chesterman, for example, proposes that "[a]dequate similarity is enough – adequate for a given purpose, in a given context ... anything more would be an inefficient use of resources" (40).³² Perhaps in many languages it would in fact be easier to say during the process of comparative examination, for example, that a TL translation is "similar" to the SL text with respect to form, content, and/or function. That would be the perspective of the translator(s). For the *users* of a translation, however, who are probably

preferences – not only with reference to the SL/C but also crucial differences that are reflected by way of comparison with the TL/C (see Matthews et al. 2011).

30 Gutt has a decided preference for "direct translation" where the Bible is concerned (cf. also Hill et al 2011:126). Pym comments: "Gutt insists not only that the original context is the one that counts, but also that this 'makes the explicitation of implicatures both unnecessary and undesirable' (1991:166). In the end, 'it is the audience's responsibility to make up for such differences' (ibid.). *Make the receiver work!*" (37, italics added). There is a formatting problem throughout Pym's discussion in this section (35-36); the five example texts that he refers to have not been marked as such, i.e. from (1) to (5).

31 According to Pym then, "The text-user's 'belief in interpretive resemblance' may be seen as a concept operative within the sub-paradigm of directive equivalence, since it depends heavily on directionality" (40). This viewpoint approaches that of a "descriptive" translation theorist (see Section 5 below).

32 Pym is citing Chesterman (1996:4) (however, there seems to be some error in this reference when compared with the entry in the book's final "References" section).

not able to check on the degree of similarity involved in any given instance, “equivalence may be a convenient fiction that allays suspicions of non-similarity”; in other words, they “simply accept the translation as equivalent, as an act of trust in the translator” (40).³³

The “frequently had arguments” against theories of “directional equivalence” are similar to those posed for “natural equivalence” in the preceding chapter – for example, that they “presuppose symmetry between languages,” or “are unnecessarily binary,” or “make the source text superior” (39). On the positive side of things, “the idea of a functional illusion makes the concept of equivalence compatible with some of the other paradigms” of translation, which “will actually pick up threads from directional equivalence” (41). Pym concludes:

Theorists working within the equivalence paradigm will probably not win all the debates. They should nevertheless be able to hold their own, and may even find quite a few blind spots in the paradigms that came later [and are discussed in subsequent chapters] (40, words in brackets added).

Bible translation consultants also need to take into further consideration the criterion of “relevance” in relation to *pedagogy* – that is, how easy, efficient, and effective a particular theory and its associated practice is to teach and for the average translators in their region to learn.³⁴

4. FUNCTIONALIST THEORIES

In chapter four Pym turns to a sequence of ostensibly non-equivalence oriented translation theories, beginning with a general approach that focuses on the notion of “purposes”: “These theories all insist that a translation is designed to achieve a purpose” (43) and may therefore be classified as primarily “functionalist” in nature.³⁵ A minority of theorists

33 In some African languages (e.g. Chewa), the concept of “similarity” (*kufanana*) would not suffice since the local correspondent term could imply a degree of inexactness or imprecision – and hence also a negative connotation.

34 In this regard, it is important to specify the primary target group, for example, Bible translators “who have (the equivalent of) secondary school education” (Hill et al. 2011:xi) versus “students at the university level” (Wilt & Wendland 2008:1)

35 This consideration of the functionalist approach may be supplemented by the overviews in Schäffner (1998), Munday (2008:79-86) and Wendland (2004:50-53).

in this group (e.g. Katharina Reiss 2000) still do emphasize that the function(s) of the source text should be reproduced in a translation, and hence they remain equivalence-based, but for the majority, the relationship of functional equivalence between SL and TL texts is only a “special case” and one that is the most difficult to achieve because it normally “requires the most textual shifts” (49).³⁶ For most functionalists then (e.g. Hans Vermeer 1989), it is the setting of reception that determines the particular function which a translation should aim to achieve, and this major shift in focus represents the introduction of a “new paradigm” (43). In other words, the target-side purpose, or communicative *Skopos*, becomes the dominant factor in the translation process:

This approach accepts that the one source text can be translated in different ways in order to carry out different functions. The translator thus needs information about the specific goals each translation is supposed to achieve, and this requires extra-textual information of some kind, usually from the client. (43)

Pym identifies the notion of “*Skopos*” (“aim/goal”) as the key to the functionalist paradigm and translation enterprise. “The basic idea is that the translator should work in order to achieve the *Skopos*, the communicative purpose of the translation, rather than just follow the source text” (44), as in directional equivalence theory. Thus, translators and their commissioners seek to determine the possible function(s) to be achieved in a translation project “in relation to their clients (a dimension wholly absent from the equivalence paradigm)” (45-46). But not so fast – is the assertion in the preceding parenthesis really true? Certainly not in the case of the mode of “directional equivalence” promoted by Nida and other Bible translation theorists. In one of the earlier formulations of the “dynamic equivalence” approach, for example, Nida and Taber (1969:14, 24) clearly state:

36 But this assertion, which Pym indirectly attributes to Vermeer (49), may be questioned. In fact, it appears to be contradicted just a few lines later, where the general *Skopos* principle is summarized: “**one text can be translated in many different ways**, to suit many different purposes” (49, original boldface). Presumably, a *Skopos* aiming for some sort of “adaptation” in the TL translation would require even more “textual shifts” than one aiming to achieve functional equivalence.

In trying to reproduce the style of the original one must beware, however, of producing something which is not functionally equivalent. ... It is functional equivalence which is required, whether on the level of content or on the level of style. ... Communication is not merely informative. It must also be expressive and imperative if it is to serve the principal purposes of communication such as those found in the Bible.³⁷

Later formulations of dynamic equivalence in Bible translation were even more strongly focused on the notion of function in relation to particular audiences:

The translator must strive to identify intellectually and emotionally with the intent and purpose of the original source, but he (*sic*) must also *identify with the concerns of his potential receptors*. ... In order to understand the significance of a number of basic principles of translation, it is important to know something about the different communicative functions of language and how languages operate to perform such functions.³⁸

However, it is important to keep in mind that the *Skopos* of a translation project does not stand on its own as a guideline for translators. It is just one component (perhaps the most important one) of what is termed the “brief” (*Auftrag*) in functionalist theory. A brief is the “job description,” which includes not only “[t]he instructions the client gives to the translator” (46), but also “describes the situation for which the target text is needed” (55) and specifies the pertinent circumstances under which it will be produced, including personnel and roles involved, a stipulated time frame, review process, pre-publication testing, operational procedures, physical setting and equipment, remuneration scales, and so forth.³⁹ One of the positive features of a functional approach is its

37 And the “clients,” or receptors of a given Bible translation are clearly in view, for its “[c]orrectness must be determined by the extent to which the average reader for which a translation is intended will be likely to understand it correctly” (Nida & Taber 1969:1).

38 De Waard & Nida (1986:14, 25; added italics). The entire second chapter of this book is devoted to a discussion of “functions and roles in Bible translating.” Pym later admits that “Nida’s approach ... could also legitimately be called ‘functionalist’” (48).

39 A sample “complete job description for translators” is given on p. 60.

emphasis on coordinated teamwork and clearly delineating all that needs to be done (tasks) during a particular translation project and who is to do them (roles).⁴⁰ Translators are thus obliged to operate according to the principle of “loyalty” when carrying out their work. They must maintain their “ethical obligations not only to texts (the traditional focus of ‘fidelity’) but more importantly to people: to senders, clients, and receivers” (55),⁴¹ everyone who may be included, whether implicitly or explicitly, within the province of the project brief. This concern also for the original document is a valuable corrective to functionalist practitioners who would delink their translation more or less completely from the source language text.⁴²

In his listing of “some virtues of the purpose paradigm” (56), Pym summarizes the arguments that have been already discussed above. However, I would take issue with his subsequent listing of “several strong points that distinguish it from the equivalence paradigm” (56). In my opinion, none of these are distinctive, certainly not in the case of experienced Bible translators and consultants who carry out their work according to the approach of “functional equivalence.” For example, Pym’s first point is that functionalist methodology “recognizes that the translator works in a professional situation, with complex obligations to people as well as to texts” (56). But what contemporary (equivalence) Scripture translation project does not recognize this too and operate accordingly? In Pym’s opinion, the purpose paradigm also “can address ethical issues in terms of free choice” (56). However, the functional orientation within the administrative instrument of the translation “brief” with its incorporated *Skopos* would surely be a strong factor that would

40 This dimension is developed in an offshoot of functionalism that employs “action theory” to more explicitly define and monitor the varied aspects of “translational action” involved during a specific project (50-51).

41 This point has been rightly emphasized (from the perspective of Bible translation practice) by Christiane Nord: “[L]oyalty means that the target-text purpose should be compatible with the original author’s intentions. ... Sometimes a thorough analysis of intratextual function markers helps the translators to find out about the communicative intentions that may have guided the author” (Nord 1997:125-126). For a much fuller description of the use of Nord’s functionalist approach to Bible translation, see Van der Merwe (forthcoming).

42 For example, “Hans Vermeer saw his *Skopos* rule effectively ‘dethroning’ the source text” (54). Dethroning is one thing – complete “banishment” is quite another, ethically illegitimate.

considerably limit such supposed “freedom.” Pym goes on to summarize a number of “frequently had arguments” against the purpose paradigm, only several of which are of much significance, such as the alleged “idealism” of *Skopos* theory, its potential “unfalsifiable” character, that it is not “cost-effective,” and it cannot deal efficiently with “cases of conflicting purposes,” and, I might also add, multiple purposes (57-59).

The main claim of functionalist theory, namely, that “a translation need not be equivalent to its source text” and its corresponding “focus on the target-side purpose which the translation is supposed to achieve” (61), may have a practical application to Bible translation in the following ways:

- (a) A functional emphasis can be used to *teach translators* the importance of carefully investigating the factor of communicative aims, not only with respect to the biblical text, but also the translation of this SL document correspondingly in their mother tongue. This assumes that a thorough investigation of TL functions in relation to all the available local literary (and/or oral) genres has already been carried out.
- (b) On the other hand, the target-text focus of functionalist theory can also be employed as a *negative teaching device*. This would be to demonstrate the complementary principle – that translators of the Scriptures must *not* ignore or contradict the macro- (genre-based) and micro- (rhetorical) functions of the biblical text as they carry out their work.
- (c) There are also *special purpose translations* to consider, such as topical portions, audio-visual productions, a dramatic version geared to attract a hard-to-reach youth audience or some other social or ethnic sub-group. Thus, the principal communicative function of the biblical text may be modified (not eliminated, but reduced in prominence), for example, from “informative” to “expressive” (and “evocative”), as in the case of a public musical rendition of a didactic gospel passage, with reference to a parable of Jesus.
- (d) Finally, the prominent concern in functionalism for the TL audience and setting of communication helps considerably to define the notion of “equivalence” in its practical application. Thus, Nord (1997:47-52) distinguishes four different types of “documentary” (more literal) version and three kinds of “instrumental” (more idiomatic) version.

These options may be combined in different places and in varying proportions within a given translation according to its governing project *Skopos*.⁴³

5. DESCRIPTIONS

For functionalist theorists (except those involved in Bible translation), the notion of equivalence became a special case, “functional consistency” being “no more than one of many possible skills a translator has to achieve” (64) on a particular project. Within the “descriptive paradigm,”⁴⁴ Pym’s next category (chapter five), equivalence is diluted to the point of non-existence, for it is regarded as “a feature of all translations” (64). So “[r]ather than prescribe what a good translation should be like, descriptive approaches try to say what translations are like or could be like” (65). As part of, or deriving from a descriptive agenda, several important “theoretical concepts” are discussed by Pym in sequence: “translation shifts, systems and polysystems, ‘assumed translations,’ a focus on the target side, norms, universals, and some proposed laws of translation” (65).

The investigation of “translation shifts” is a comparative methodology used to identify, describe, and categorize the principal structural differences between a given source text and its translation. Pym summarizes several representative approaches that feature “bottom-up shift analysis” as distinct from “top down shift analysis.” The former is rather disappointing in that it allegedly reflects the “equivalence” paradigm (66), it does not always distinguish form from function (67),⁴⁵ and tends to “produce much doubt and even more data” (68). A top-down approach, on the other hand, is explanatory, seeking to provide general reasons for the major categories of translation shift observed – that is, “theories about the possible causes (personal, institutional, historical)

43 For a functionalist-oriented evaluation and illustration of these issues in relation to Chinese Bible translations, see Peng (2012).

44 See also Munday (2008:107-123); Wendland (2004:54-57). This paradigm of loosely related theories is often termed “Descriptive Translation Studies” (DTS) after the pioneering study of Toury (1995).

45 In this connection, Pym makes the important observation that “there are many cases where formal correspondence itself implies some kind of shift” (68). In other words, instead of preserving the source text, a literal, formally correspondent rendering frequently distorts it, from the level of surface linguistics (i.e. unnaturalness) to that of deep-level conceptual perception and ideology (e.g. a term like “democracy”).

explaining why people translate differently” (68). We have, for example, Holmes’s proposed “model of options for the translation of [secular] verse” (69), none of which would be unfamiliar to most Bible translators. But “[w]hen asked how any decision should be made, the descriptivist will always be able to say, ‘it depends on the situation’” (70). However, that is not very helpful. “Is there any way to model the huge range of variables covered by phrases like ‘the translator’s situation’?” (70).⁴⁶ Pym proceeds to answer this by surveying a number of important descriptivist tools – systems, norms, assumptions, universals, and laws.

I found the discussion of “systems” to be very difficult to follow and even harder to find in it much practical relevance for Bible translators.⁴⁷ Part of the problem lies in the rather confusing use of terminology. Thus, “the term ‘system’ is used here only in the sense of ‘theoretical possibilities’ ... [which] is quite different from the kind of social or cultural system presented as the context in which translations function” (71).⁴⁸ What are we to make then of Pym’s own query: “Can the levels [of analysis] of ‘should be’ and ‘is’ be properly systemic in any strong sense?” (71). What could we do with the answer to such a question if we were able to answer it? Even our familiar term “function” is redefined to mean the social “position” and relative influence of a certain translation within its corresponding cultural system. For example, “When we say that, within a given cultural system, a translation is relatively ‘central’ or ‘peripheral,’ we effectively mean that its function is either to change or to reinforce the receiving language, culture, or literature” (72). According to Even-Zohar,⁴⁹ most translations are more “peripheral” rather than “central” in their influence, that is, “translations tend to have a conservative, reinforcing effect rather than a revolutionary, innovative one” (72). In this instance, we do have an interesting and important factor

46 Pym seems to be unaware of the “frames of reference” model (for example, Wilt & Wendland 2008), which would presumably assist in this descriptivist endeavor – certainly more so than the more abstract, alternative models that he cites in his overview.

47 This was for me a typical response to much of the theory that Pym discusses in the second half of his book. It is too obscure, impractical, and/or irrelevant for Bible translation on most levels of application.

48 Pym notes that “[t]he term ‘system’ ... varies in meaning and importance from theorist to theorist” (72).

49 Even-Zohar (1978a). The term “polysystem” refers to culture as a complex interaction of sub-systems, e.g. linguistic, literary, historical, political, economic, educational, military, artistic, and so forth (72).

to investigate from the perspective of Bible translation, especially in situations where several versions exist within a particular society, but the qualifiers “conservative, reinforcing” and “revolutionary, innovative” would need to be carefully defined in advance.⁵⁰

In the case of “norms,” “Toury opens a space for what ‘should be’” (73), but this certainly sounds “prescriptive” to me, that is, contrary to the general paradigm of DTS. This is clear from Toury’s definition as well, for norms involve “the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community ... into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations, specifying what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioral dimension” (Toury 1995:55). It should be noted that the expression “performance instructions” is not to be understood in the sense of the “brief” of functionalist theory, for “the term norm usually operates at a wider, more social level ... more like a common standard practice in terms of which all other types of practice are marked” (Toury 1995:55).

Different kinds of norm are distinguished, e.g. “preliminary,” “operational,” “professional,” “expectancy” norms, and “[i]deally, the different types ... reinforce one another, so that translators tend to do what clients and readers expect of them” (74). Yet surely these norms cannot operate independently, on their own, that is, without some sort of previously determined functional *Skopos* to guide translators during their work.⁵¹ Pym points out that there is a considerable degree of “relativism” involved in the descriptivist paradigm, for “[i]f we apply the concept of norms seriously, we should probably give up the idea of defining once and for all what a good translation is supposed to be” (74).⁵² What can

50 For example, Even-Zohar proposes that “translations play an innovative or central role when ... a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is ‘young,’ in the process of being established” (72, citing Even-Zohar 1978b:47). This observation would seem to be true in the case of many early (“missionary”) Bible translations in East and Southern Africa. However, the linguistic and literary influence here was generally not very positive in terms of naturalness and creativity of verbal expression in the vernacular.

51 A good discussion of translation norms is also found in Baker (1998:163-165).

52 In fact, “Toury (1995) explicitly recommends **starting analysis from the translation** rather than from the source text; he thus creates space for research that takes no account of the source text at all” (75, original boldface). I would regard such “research” as having nothing to do with “translation” (in the narrow, commonly accepted sense) at all.

then serve as a practical guide for a Bible translation team? As long as they are able to persuade the target community to “accept” their version, no matter what its actual exegetical or stylistic “quality,” it would apparently qualify as a “good translation.” Paradoxically, however, the socially-defined “norms” of DTS are sometimes used prescriptively in the “training of translators and interpreters” and even predictively to suggest “the relative success of one strategy or another” (75). This seems to be a case of having one’s cake and eating it too, an approach that is too nebulous and equivocal for use in the practice of Bible translation, except for its obvious “prescriptive” aspects.

The ambivalence of the DTS approach appears also with respect to the fundamental issue of defining “what is meant by the term ‘translation’” (76). On the one hand, this task is seemingly left to the TL receptors themselves; in other words, “a translation is a translation only for as long as someone assumes it is one” (76). As Pym observes, “[t]hat solution remains fraught with logical difficulties” (76) – many practical ones too, I might add, for example, in cases of misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and gross incompetence in actual performance. On the other hand, Toury himself proposes three well-formulated “postulates” that should help people to define what a “translation” is, namely, principles that pertain to the “source text,” the “transfer” process, and the linguistic “relationship” between the SL and TL texts (77).⁵³ It is rather surprising then to see, for example, the “source text postulate” expressed in terms that would please any “directional equivalence” theorist: “There is another text, in another culture/language, which has both *chronological and logical priority* over [the translation] and is presumed to have served as the *departure point and basis* for it” (Toury 1995:33-34, added emphasis).

Since a “fundamental tenet of the descriptive paradigm is that translations can be studied scientifically,” then “the aim of research is to discover ‘universals’ or ‘laws’ of translation” (78). These “universals,” first of all, pertain to the “linguistic features [of translations] that can be actually measured,” but as Pym notes, “The search for universals is not an easy affair” (78-79). However, in more recent years the process of language comparison and consequent translation practice has been facilitated by cognitive techniques such as corpus studies analysis, think-aloud protocols, *Translog* software for recording key-strokes, as well as screen and electronic eye tracking for recording translation processes

53 These three postulates sound strangely similar in terms of their respective points of reference to the “three stages” of dynamic equivalence theory, namely, “analysis,” “transfer,” and “restructuring” (Nida & Taber 1969:33).

(81). Pym proposes five basic universals that seem to have widespread acceptance; thus translations are characterized by “lexical simplification,” “explicitation” (greater redundancy), “adaptation” (i.e. to the norms of the target language and culture), “equalizing” (of linguistic qualities on “the oral-literate continuum” during simultaneous oral interpretation), and a reduced occurrence of “unique items” in translations (79-81). While “universals” pertain to the linguistic features or tendencies that characterize translations, “[t]he quest for laws, on the other hand, aims to state *why* such features should be found in translations” as a result of influences found “in the society, culture, or psychology of the translator” (81-82). Pym describes two significant “laws of tendency,” first, the “law of growing standardization” where (peripheral) translations accommodate to “established modes and repertoires” (82). Second, we have the “law of interference,” where structures in the source text, especially on the macrostructural level, are duplicated in a translation, even though they are not normal, especially in a less prestigious TL (83).

Among the “frequently had arguments” against the descriptivist paradigm are several that concern the training of translators. First, “we need prescriptions (for good translations), not descriptions (of any old translations)” (84). Second, “[t]he focus on norms promotes conservative positions” with regard to translational practices (84). However, such arguments do not hold in the case of training programs that are more flexible, extensive, and broad-minded. Therefore, the descriptions of published translations, both good ones and poor ones, can be used as positive and negative models respectively to develop the prescriptive principles of high-quality translations. The same goes for language- and situation-specific norms, which “may be taught as a series of viable alternatives ... [as] a way to empower translators by enhancing their repertoires of solutions” (85). Accordingly, translators need to be instructed how to effectively “break” these norms as well as to maintain them, depending on the social setting and type of translation project concerned or version desired. Such flexibility would be especially important in situations where a new, “ecumenical” (e.g., Protestant-Catholic) Bible version is being prepared to complement several older versions that are already in widespread use. The careful prior comparative “description” of these earlier versions would be a significant aspect of the project’s preparation stage.⁵⁴

54 The “frames of reference” model might be a helpful tool in such preliminary research, that is, when undertaking a detailed analysis of a given version’s sociocultural, organizational, communicational, and (inter)textual frames in

Pym makes some interesting comments when concluding his chapter on the paradigm of “descriptions” in current translation studies:

A great deal of research has been carried out within the descriptive frame. We could mention countless studies ... The worrying thing, though, is that none of these numerous avenues of investigation seems to have come up with any major new statement on the level of translation theory. ... There is certainly a lot of theorizing, but most of the concepts come from other disciplines and are *applied* to translation, making translation theory an importer rather than exporter of ideas (86).⁵⁵

But is that not how it has more or less always happened in the widely interdisciplinary field of translation studies, for example, in the case of the United Bible Societies, from Nida’s “dynamic equivalence,” which was based largely on generative linguistics, to more recent explorations in the “frames of reference” approach, which derives from cognitive linguistics?⁵⁶ Why should translation theory have to come up with something completely new on its own – is not the creative,

order to determine how these may have influenced the resultant translation in the case of critical or sensitive theological (e.g. “Messiah”) and technical (e.g. “ark of the covenant”) terminology and linguistic usage (e.g. dialectal differences) (see Wilt & Wendland 2008). Several recent doctoral dissertations in the field of “Bible translation” at the University of Stellenbosch have been carried out using this framework as a guide to critical analysis and comparative assessment by mother-tongue speakers of African languages.

55 On the other hand, perhaps one might be more sympathetic to this apparent lack of theoretical success on the part of DTS, if it is indeed true that “[w]ithin contemporary translation studies the traditional concept of translation is unable to determine what translation actually is or identify all the different situations in which it occurs. Ironically, the larger contemporary world of scholarship, outside the disciplines of translation studies, understands translation in a much broader sense” (Arduini & Nergaard 2011:13). This is most certainly an interdisciplinary irony – if it must be left to non-translation disciplines to define for translation studies, whether rightly or wrongly, what “translation” is all about.

56 In a recent article (Wendland 2010), I have tried to make the connection between cognitive linguistics and the frames of reference model more explicit and hopefully stimulating of even more development in terms of the resulting theory and its practice in Bible translation.

interdisciplinary mix of borrowed theories and practical models just as valuable (if it works!)?⁵⁷

6. *UNCERTAINTY*

Thus far we have considered three of the major translation “paradigms” posited by Pym (considering the two “equivalence” versions as one). There are three that remain, but these will not take as long to describe because their relevance for Bible translation theory and practice is not as direct or great.⁵⁸ The first gives us a suggestion of this reduced level of significance by its very name – “uncertainty” (chapter six), and Pym admits that the more loosely linked theories discussed under this paradigm “can be difficult to understand” (90). Perhaps that is because its basic premise is so non-committal: “we can never be entirely sure of the meanings that we translate” (90).⁵⁹ According to Pym, there are two principal reasons for “the increasing dissatisfaction with equivalence” (91) and meaning in general. The first concerns the “instability of the source,” which refers to ancient texts that involved a long period of manuscript transmission and therefore “were not stable points of departure to which any translation could be considered equivalent” (91). If scholars of this opinion have the Scriptures in mind – the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (Pym does not mention them) – then they need to do some reading in the theory and practice of biblical text criticism, which assures readers that only a relatively small portion of the source

57 Gutt’s application of “relevance theory” to Bible translation is a rare example of one theory being used as the basis for a single, unified translation approach. That is its strength (theoretically) but, at least some would argue, also its weakness from a practical, pedagogical perspective – as revealed in a recently published workbook (Hill et al. 2011; cf. Wendland forthcoming).

58 This is not to say that these theories/paradigms are less important for translation, or even literary, studies in general – only from the more limited perspective that I have adopted in this article.

59 Such a translation principle would seem to be the most antithetical to the equivalence paradigm. Yet Pym goes out of his way at the beginning of this chapter to reassure readers of the latter’s continued relevance: “The basic tenets of the equivalence paradigm still underlie much of the work done in translation today. It is still the dominant paradigm in most linguistic approaches, especially when it comes to terminology and phraseology. ... Equivalence is by no means dead, but it has certainly been questioned” (91).

text is in doubt,⁶⁰ and “most variants make little difference to the (essential) meaning of any passage” (Wegner 2006:298). This issue turns out to be rather minor as an “uncertainty” factor, and Pym devotes only a single paragraph to it.

Much more important for the paradigm at hand is his second point – “epistemological skepticism” (91), where not only the reliability of the textual source is questioned, but meaning in general: How can we determine the sense and significance of texts at all when different cultures perceive and different languages express meaning and its relationships so differently? Such manifold doubt is reflected in the so-called “uncertainty principle” (93):

[A] text never fully determines (causes, explains, justifies, or accounts for) what a reader understands of it. Each receiver brings a set of conceptual frames to the text, and the reception process is thus an interaction between the text and those frames. The same would then hold for translation: no source text fully determines a translation of that text, if only because translations rely on observations and interpretations.

But obviously, no person is an island to him/herself in the process of interpretation; one is normally shaped or influenced hermeneutically by the ideas and opinions of one’s social group – in the case of the Scriptures, by one’s religious community and their collective written and oral tradition. Thus one’s conceptual frames of reference may be considerably narrowed, enlarged, or modified, first through a careful exegetical study of the source text and its extralinguistic context. This individual activity is then aided (molded, modified, etc.) by the input of others, whether verbally (e.g., by colleagues in conference) or through some formal published media (e.g., scholarly commentaries, AV tools, and manifold online resources).

To be sure, we can never be 100% sure of any meaning, and “indeterminacy will never completely go away” (94). However, through procedures such as those just mentioned (and others), we can become “sure enough” with regard to understanding a particular text to be able to think and act in accordance with it with a sufficient degree of certainty that allows us to make intellectual progress in various endeavors.⁶¹ Hence

60 “Approximately 10 percent of the Old Testament and 7 percent of the New Testament” (Wegner 2006:298).

61 With regard to the thorny issue of authorial “intended meaning” in relation to the ancient texts of Scripture, I have already stated and defended my position

an observation such as “Quine’s principle of the indeterminacy of translation” is not only exaggerated and unfair, it is also unhelpful from a practical standpoint:

Manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech disposition, yet incompatible with one another. In countless places they will diverge in giving, as their respective translations of a sentence of one language, sentences of the other language which stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence however loose. (95, citing Quine 1960:27)

There are many Bible translation manuals on the market, and though they may differ in underlying theory and recommended practice, I have not found any one text to be completely “incompatible” with the others or unusable. Although the proposed translations of the same Bible passage may differ, the varied renderings can normally be shown to be somehow related to each other in terms of form, content, and/or function.

Pym then goes on to compare different theories of determinism and indeterminism in language and translation. “The general idea of indeterminacy may be used to divide translation theories into those that assume the possibility of exact communication of some kind (**determinist**: what X means is what Y understands) and those that do not (**indeterminist**: we can never be sure that the two sides share the same meaning)” (95, original boldface). But I get a little lost in Pym’s line of argumentation as he compares “Cratylistic determinacy” and “Hermogenic indeterminacy” in relation to translation.⁶² He concludes that “an indeterminist theory of naming can produce an equivalence-based theory of translation,” which leads to “the paradox of a determinist theory of expression underlying an indeterminist theory of translation” (97). Rather more helpful is a citation from the Italian theorist Benedetto Croce, which Pym claims makes the point that “translation cannot be governed by equivalence, at least not on any aesthetic level” (98). Thus we have only:

in favor of this more optimistic hermeneutical position and will therefore not take the space to do so here (cf. Wendland 2004:242-243, 262-264, 298).

62 Pym bases his analogy on “two characters [Cratylus and Hermogenes] in the Socratic dialogue of Plato’s *Cratylus* who hold opposed views about the way words have meanings” (96).

The *relative* possibility of translations; not as reproductions of the same original expressions (which would be vain to attempt), but as productions of *similar* expressions more or less nearly resembling the originals. The translation called good is an approximation which has original value as work of art and can stand by itself. (98; original italics, added underline)

However, this sounds like a tolerable expression of “directional equivalence” to me,⁶³ since no realistic theory of equivalence in translation would insist upon an exact likeness between the source and the translation texts – only the closest possible correspondence, or similarity, with regard to form and/or meaning as specified by the project brief.

Having considered a number of the major theories that would fall under the uncertainty paradigm, Pym surveys several more that hopefully show us “how to live with uncertainty” (101), including those promoting “illumination,” “consensus,” “hermeneutics,” “constructivism,” “game theory,” and “semiosis” (101-108). Just a few selective comments regarding these are necessary. Under the category of “illumination,” Pym mentions the rather strange trio of Augustine, Martin Luther, and Ernst-August Gutt, apparently since they all appear to subscribe, more or less, to the notion that “language is hugely indeterminate” and that “real communication lies in shared experience” (102), a perspective (not noted by Pym) that is shared by many of the modern proponents of cognitive linguistics.⁶⁴ One wonders why the section on “hermeneutics” – the “idea that texts are not immediately meaningful and need to be actively interpreted” (103) – is included under “uncertainty,” except in the sense that “great texts will always retain their untranslatable secrets” (105). Theories of “constructivism” – that “we actively ‘construct’ what we see

63 Perhaps more specifically this would apply to “*literary* functional equivalence” (Wendland 2004:245, 369).

64 For example, “Cognitive Linguistics ... embodies the resemanticization of grammar by focusing on the interplay between languages and conceptualization. ... In Cognitive Linguistics, we examine how our ‘glasses’ – that is, our physical, cognitive, and social embodiment – ground our linguistic conceptualizations. ... Ideas that were originally formulated by Gestalt play a central role in Cognitive Linguistics: foremost among these are the Figure/Ground distinction and, more generally, the idea that meanings do not exist in isolation but have to be understood in a larger context ...” (Geearts & Cuyckens 2007:15, 27, 597).

and know of the world” (105) – would seem to fit better in the last chapter (chapter eight), which deals with the specificities of “cultural translation.”⁶⁵ The application of “game theory” would be especially helpful if developed as an explicit, practice-oriented, problem-solving technique in translator training programs:⁶⁶

As translators proceed, they are confronted with numerous points where their rendition could be one of several possible translations, and the decision to opt for one of the possibilities depends on more than what is in the source ... One decision becomes a determinant for others. The result is that translating is determined not just by the source text, but by the patterns of the translator’s own decisions (106-107).

Teaching new translators to recognize these different options and then to later evaluate their progression of choices would be a valuable part of the training procedure. Therefore, I do not think that this overall process needs to be as “uncertain” as Pym’s discussion seems to suggest. Rather, the principles of “directional equivalence” may be used to significantly reduce uncertainty and indecision. To be sure, when translators begin, they may not know all (or even some) of the critical choices that they will have to make along the way, let alone the ultimate result in the form of a TL text. But they must at least have a general aim (*Skopos*) and audience in mind at the outset, a perspective that will serve as a general frame of reference to guide their sequence of translation choices and subsequent revisions as they proceed.

Finally, “theories of semiosis,” which suggest that meaning continually evolves in translation, and Derrida’s notion of “deconstruction,” which “sees translation as a form of transformation”⁶⁷ (107-110) give the

65 Pym notes how the approach of “constructivism” is useful in training translators as well as their teachers about different translation options and their theoretical as well as practical consequences (105-106).

66 In a later section that seems somewhat out of place, “So how should we translate?” Pym mentions Chau’s study of personal characteristics that translators need to develop in response to a “heightened awareness of uncertainty” in their work: They need to become “more humble ... honest ... efficient ... confident ... [and] responsible” (111). However, this is good advice also for translators who happen to be more “certain” as they conduct their business.

67 It is interesting to note that the two key semiosis theorists referred to, Umberto Eco and Roman Jakobson, both uphold the notion of a “translation proper,”

impression of being quite evident on the surface level of understanding, but they tend to be opaque on the philosophical level, hence of little value, either for the teaching or the exercise of Bible translation.⁶⁸ In the end, I must conclude in agreement with one of the “frequently had arguments” against the uncertainty paradigm and its central principles, namely, that “theories of indeterminacy offer very few guidelines that might be of practical use to translators” (113).⁶⁹

7. LOCALIZATION

Pym’s penultimate paradigm is “localization” (chapter seven), which refers to the contextualized application of a flexible marketing strategy, sophisticated information technology, and manifold linguistic manipulation. The aim is to create a text in a local language of wider communication that has been tailor-made to fit a specific world “locale” (121),⁷⁰ for example, in terms of time conventions, numbers, weights/measures, currency, scripts, etc. (122). This process may be generalized then through “internationalization” to produce a standardized document in terms of language and cultural background that can be

that is, a “sense of translation that remains in touch with fairly traditional concepts,” including “equivalence” (108).

68 Although “Derrida often uses translation to investigate the plurality of source texts, here in a sense of revealing their ‘semantic richness’ ... [he] does not seek to remove the special status of the source text. ... [and] when Derrida comes to the discussion of actual translations, he is remarkably conservative” (109-110). It is very well then to publish elaborate scholarly studies on various aspects of uncertainty theory, but when it comes down to actually translating those publications, a much less grandiose type of practice will have to be adopted, normally, a method that favors one form of directional equivalence or the other.

69 “They would seem to be theories for theorists, or for philosophers, or even for nitpickers” (113). This is not Pym’s opinion; he does try to find some practical wheat amidst all the theoretical uncertainty chaff.

70 A “locale” is more technically defined as “a set of linguistic, economic, and cultural parameters for the end use” of a given textual product (121). This term is intended to “replace expressions like ‘target language and/or culture’” (122). Would a translation then be called a “locale version”? Pym points out certain similarities between the approach of localization and *Skopos* theory (123, 125).

readily adapted for translation into many diverse “locales” (122).⁷¹ These two text-processing techniques may work in tandem as follows:

Internationalization [prepares] the product prior to the moment of translation. This makes the actual translation processes easier and faster. Once internationalization has taken place, localization can work directly from the internationalized version, without necessary reference to the source (124).

Of course, it depends on what kind of source text one is dealing with. In the case of the Scriptures, this methodology does not produce accurate and acceptable results. The Good News Translation (TEV, GNB), for example, provided an “internationalized version” for second language speakers of English that was often rendered more or less literally into target languages all over the world.⁷² The GNT was relatively easy to understand and translate, but as many translators came to realize, this was not a reliable way to carry out their work, and on occasion it even led to the complete rejection of a particular “common language” version.⁷³

71 Internationalization is “reverse localization,” or “delocalization” (123-124), but Pym’s terminology is at times confusing, for example, “In localization ... we move from a source to a general intermediary version” (123) – which I would understand rather to be “internationalization.” According to Bassnett (2011:37), “International English, which in this sense can be viewed as a bad translation of itself, is a supraterritorial language that has lost its essential connection to a specific cultural context.

72 This was not the recommended practice (e.g. in UBS or SIL), but it often resulted from the “base-model” method, where translators were instructed to determine the meaning of the biblical text by comparing a FC version, like RSV (the “source”), with a DE version, like TEV (the “model”), and then encouraged to re-express that derived meaning in their language. However, since the TEV was usually much easier to understand than the RSV, its text was often simply rendered literally in the TL.

73 One language community in Zambia, for example, rejected their new common language translation because of a number of “watered-down” renditions of key biblical terms, e.g. “grace,” and due to the use of modernistic Western illustrations that were simply imported from the TEV. As a result, thousands of vernacular Bibles had to be transformed into paper pulp in order to reduce the overhead of unsold stock.

Pym has a rather long section on the “role of technologies” in the process of localization. For example, with special reference to translator-training programs:

The training usually involves translation memories, specific tools for the localization of software or websites, terminology management, and increasingly integrated machine translation, with perhaps a content-management system, globalization management system, or project management tool as well (127).

Such electronic technology has also been playing an ever-increasing role in Bible translation efforts during this 21st century. In the United Bible Societies (UBS), for example, the “Paratext” program functions as part of a systematic, computerized text-production procedure, including publishing, coupled with regular project monitoring, evaluating, and reporting by means of the internet-based “Translation Management System.”⁷⁴ Pym helpfully describes some of the typical tasks that technology can assist with during the localization and/or generalization process (132-135) and raises a question concerning the nature of equivalence that is involved. His conclusion:

This “internationalized” equivalence is no longer “natural” (contextualized by the dynamics of social language and culture) or “directional” (with one-off creativity). It has become fundamentally **standardized, artificial**, the creation of a **purely technical language and culture**, in many cases the language of a particular company (133, original boldface).

Naturally, all Bible translation agencies would want to avoid such a result in any of their various applications of technology aimed at rendering the overall text-conversion process more efficient and effective. In view of this, a number of the “frequently had arguments” that Pym cites may be pertinent, in particular: “Localization belittles translators ... [and] leads to lower qualities of texts and communication, ... [while reducing] cultural diversity” (137). In concluding a brief discussion of “the future of localization” (138-140), Pym makes an important observation, one that

74 Pym discusses some of the corresponding tools used in secular translation projects on pp. 128-131, for example, “management systems,” “XML” (eXtensible Markup Language), and “translation memories” for use as a glossing tool. See also Munday (2009:106-127).

has obvious relevance for Bible translation work that is being carried out all over the world today:

The localization industry [if it is not overshadowed, downplayed neglected, or even extinguished by the economic motives and generalizing forces of internationalization] has an active interest in the defense of linguistic and cultural diversity, in the strength of [less prominent] locales, since that is where markets can be expanded. ... Accessibility thus becomes an issue of democracy and social ethics, and a large part of accessibility is the availability of information in one's language. (140, material in brackets added)

How true also in the case of the Scriptures!

8. *CULTURAL TRANSLATION*

Pym's final chapter (chapter eight) deals with the paradigm of "cultural translation." But immediately a question is raised as to whether this chapter belongs in the book at all,⁷⁵ even from a secular perspective. This is because a number of diverse approaches are considered here that "do not refer to translations as finite texts. ... Instead translation is seen as a general activity of communication between cultural groups" (143).⁷⁶ An even broader, more revealing summary of this paradigm is stated as follows:

75 It would seem to fit much better in a study of intercultural communication and interethnic social relationships.

76 The term "translation" is thus being used metonymically here, at the risk of considerable obscurity and misappropriation. From this figurative standpoint then, the whole field of "translation studies [now embrace] a broader, transdisciplinary perspective that sees translation as an instantiation of more general cognitive and cultural processes of the creation, communication, and transformation of meaning, within and across cultures" (de Vries 2011:79). Along these same lines, Gentzler (2012) raises a question of redefinition: "What if we erase the border completely and rethink translation as an always ongoing process of every communication. Translation becomes viewed less as a speech-act carried out between languages and cultures, and instead as a condition underlying the languages and cultures upon which communication is based". But does such a broadened vision of translation help us to interlingual, cross-cultural communication any better, or only confuse the pertinent issues that arise during its performance?

“Cultural translation” may be understood as a process in which there is no source text and usually no fixed target text. The focus is cultural processes rather than products. The prime cause of cultural translation is the movement of people (subjects) rather than the movement of texts (objects) (144).

Why then is the term “translation” used in this connection, one might wonder. Furthermore, this group of theorists tends to use expressions that defy comprehension, such as, “the language of the Americas is translation.”⁷⁷ Typical among these is “Homi Bhabha” and his view of “non-substantive translation” (144). At the end of a survey of Bhabha’s philosophical notions, “[o]ne may be tempted to dismiss Bhabha’s contribution as no more than a set of vague opinions presented in the form of fashionable metaphors” (147). But Pym feels that this paradigm “reveals some aspects that have been ignored or sidelined by other paradigms,” such as, “the perspective of the (figurative) translator,” “cultural hybridity,” the “material movements” of peoples, and “the problem of the two-sided border figured by translators” (147-148). But why do we need such “translation without translations” at all, and coupled with this a “move beyond a focus on translations as (written or spoken) texts” (148)? I could see no benefit in this set of perspectives, at least not from the point of view of translation studies and established terminology that has been gratuitously hijacked.⁷⁸

In the apparent attempt to rehabilitate the paradigm of “cultural translation” and give it some credibility, Pym recycles the idea of “semiosis” (“meaning is constantly created by interpretation”), which was discussed earlier under the “uncertainty” paradigm (chapter six; 148-150)

77 Cited by Pym from the program statement of the journal *New Centennial Review* (142).

78 As already noted, the language used to present this paradigm is often obscurantist, for example: “Translation is the performative nature of cultural communication. It is language *in actu* (enunciation, positionality) rather than language *in situ* (*énoncé*, or propositionality). And the sign of translation continually tells, or ‘tolls’ the different times and spaces between cultural authority and its performative practices” (Bhabha 1994:227). The fact that this observation (and more) is reproduced in a new journal on the subject (*Translation* 2011:19-20) presents the interesting case of where many readers will require a translation (i.e. *intralingual*) of an article on translation!

and “transfer theory,”⁷⁹ another aspect of “systems theory” (considered under “description” in chapter five; 151-152), but these efforts do not take us very far. Nor does Pym’s own endeavor “to build a whole view of translations as textual responses to the movements of objects across time and space” (152), a phenomenon that could be more effectively referred to through the use of some distinctive expression (e.g., “transfers”). A series of other disciplines that use the term “translation” figuratively are then described: “ethnographic descriptions” and “the translation of a culture” (153-154),⁸⁰ “translation sociology” (154-156),⁸¹ and the “psychoanalytics of translation” (157-158).⁸² All in all, therefore, I would again have to strongly endorse Pym’s listing of the “frequently had arguments” against the “cultural translation paradigm”: “These theories only use translation as a metaphor” (159);⁸³ they are “an excuse for intellectual wandering” (160);⁸⁴ they create “a space for weak

79 “The term ‘transfer’ here means that a textual model from one system is not just used in another; it is *integrated* into the relations of the host system and thereby both undergoes and [also] generates change” (151).

80 Comprehensive ethnographic studies of course do include genuine translations in the sense of rendering collected SL texts (usually oral) into the TL language of the scholar, for example: “good translations [usually literal or interlinear] show the structure and nature of the foreign culture,” primarily for the benefit of fellow scholars and researchers (153, material in brackets added).

81 In this case, “the ‘translation’ part refers to the method of analysis rather than to the object under analysis. ... Translation becomes the process through which we form social relations” (155).

82 “The general idea is that psychoanalysis concerns the use of language, translation is a use of language, so in translations we can find traces of the unconscious” (157). The preceding assertion was seemingly intended to function as a syllogism, but its logic escapes me.

83 “They are drawing ideas from one area of experience (the things translators do) to a number of other areas (the ways cultures interrelate)” (59). On the other hand, the term “translation” and various metaphors for translation are already being freely used in other scientific disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and even molecular biology (Willson 2011). One thus begins to wonder if the word can fully retain its rightful technical, interlingual use and can accordingly be correctly understood in its narrow original sense.

84 “Antoine Berman’s term ‘vagabondage conceptuel’” ... criticizes “the temptation to associate change with translation ... [which] can lead to a view

interdisciplinarity” (160);⁸⁵ they “can be studied entirely in English” and are “not in touch with the translation profession” (161).⁸⁶ Furthermore, I would not agree with Pym’s conclusion, namely, that “the virtues of cultural translation are significant enough to have been included in this book” (162).⁸⁷

9. CLOSING REMARKS

In a final “Postscript,” Pym “positions” himself theoretically in relation to the different paradigms of translation that he has considered in his book and encourages readers also to make the effort to align themselves. He actually does this twice, the second time from the perspective of “risk management”: “instead of saying that different translation solutions are ‘right’ or ‘wrong,’ or are instances of one kind of equivalence or another, I try to assess how much risk they involve. The work of the translator becomes an exercise in risk management” (165). This may well prove to be a helpful approach to adopt as a translation training technique, but the instructor would first have to clarify what constitutes a “risk” and how to evaluate how “risky” it is in relation to the nature of the text being translated, its intended audience, their desires, expectations, and needs, as well as the proposed primary setting of use and medium of communication.

where everything can translate everything else, where there is ‘universal translatability’” (160).

85 “[T]he various theorists of culture [steal] the notion of translation, without due appreciation of any of the other paradigms of translation theory” (160).

86 Many of “the people [in the disciplines associated with cultural translation] who theorize do not actually know how to translate, so they do not really know about translation” (161, material in brackets added).

87 Of course, this position opens me up to the charge of being an epistemological Luddite as far as developments in contemporary translation theory goes – that is, according to the new journal *Translation*. Here we see the emergence of modern “post-translation studies, where translation is viewed as fundamentally transdisciplinary, mobile, and open-ended ... [where] translation has to be considered as a transformative representation of, in, and among cultures and individuals” (Arduini & Nergaard 2011:8, 12). However, resisting such usage whereby “translation has become a fecund and frequent metaphor for our contemporary intercultural world” (Arduini & Nergaard 2011:8), I will, for the time being, continue to utilize (and defend) the more restrained reference to “‘real’ translation” (Arduini & Nergaard 2011:13) as an interlingual, intercultural process of communication involving verbal texts.

In conclusion, I do not hesitate in placing *Exploring Translation Theories* very high up on a list of recommended readings for all Bible translation consultants, well-educated Bible translators, and biblical scholars who work in the original languages. Pym's study is engaging and well-written, with very few errors and a readable, well-designed page format (though the type is rather small). There are no supplementary notes (foot- or end), thus presenting readers with a bit of a trade-off: they can perhaps move through the book more quickly, but the text does get rather cluttered at times with detailed information or subordinate discussion that could have been relegated to the notes. A comprehensive list of References and an informative Index are included at the back. The book gives a personal, more critical review of modern translation theory and practice than an equally valuable text, Munday's *Introducing Translation Studies*, which is more descriptive and documentary in nature. Indeed, these two books would complement each other well in any advanced program of translator-training. The "suggested projects and activities" at the end of each chapter would be especially useful for this purpose.⁸⁸

Pym does not have very much to say about Bible translation per se, and he refers only to the works of (early) Nida and Gutt. That may be understandable in a survey that focuses on contemporary secular theory, but by doing so he appears to have overlooked several recent developments which current professional philosophy, paradigms, and praxis might do well to take cognizance of, namely, the ongoing development of some rather sophisticated electronic translation tools and platforms, like Paratext,⁸⁹ the importance of the oral-aural factor in all types of translation, purely written forms included,⁹⁰ and the growing influence of cognitive linguistics (frame semantics) as a theoretical model for translation – and communication in general – for example, as

88 Compare Munday's equally stimulating chapter-ending "Discussion and research points" (2008; note: the 3rd edition of this popular text, 2012, is very similar to the 2nd, except for the final chapter).

89 A recent issue of *The Bible Translator – Practical Papers* (62[2], 2011) is devoted to the subject "Computers as Translators: Translation or Treason?"

90 Pym "adopts a view of translation that included interpreting (spoken translation), but does not give any special attention to the problems of interpreting" (xi). However, the esthetic quality of a printed/published translation, certainly any version of Scripture, can only be fully evaluated when it is actually heard *aloud*.

employed in the “frames of reference” approach.⁹¹ Pym also does “not go along with theories that assume supremacy of the source text” (165), which is a perspective that many Bible translators and theorists will not agree with. In fact, his theoretical “exploration” reinforced for me the conclusion that the only translation paradigm which takes the ST seriously is that of “equivalence.” These quibbles aside, in my opinion Pym’s *Exploring Translation Theories* has admirably accomplished its initially stated aim, which is “to focus more squarely on the main theories, not the research or applications, and to make those theories engage with each other” (xi).⁹² Such critical engagement with modern translation theory, purpose, practice, and prognosis – in specific reference now to variously communicating the text of Scripture – has also been the objective of this review.

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91 See, for example, Wendland (2008:160-161, 192-193, 216-217, 308-309). Several papers at the 2010 Nida Institute conference (on “Translation and Cognition”) suggested the use of a “mental space” model for translation, for example, Baicchi’s “Combined Input Hypothesis.”

92 “This means presenting more criticisms than the overviews do” (xi), which, as I have noted above, is a valuable aspect of Pym’s approach.

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