

Biblical Scholars, Translators and Bible Translations*

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Abstract

There are three distinct groups—biblical scholars, faith communities, and translators—involved in any Bible translation project, each with a distinctive role. From the perspective of the *skopos* or a goal-oriented approach to Bible translation, the role of biblical scholars is to line up the pluralities, indeterminacies and possibilities of translation. The role of the faith communities is to specify how the Bible functions in their communities, for example in the liturgy, and how they view “the Bible” in their traditions, textually, canonically and otherwise. The task of the translators is to choose, from the (legitimate) range of options specified by the biblical scholars, those options that best correspond to the *skopos* (or goals) of the translation as specified by the faith communities that will use the translation.

I. Introduction

Anyone who undertakes the noble task of translating the Bible is confronted with the fact that translating always involves a process that starts with pluralities and ends with a single translation. The translation as a finished product makes invisible both the original pluralities and the decision-making process that lies beneath the surface.

The pluralities lie both in the biblical source text and in the process of its translation. In the case of the Bible the pluralities of the source texts start with canonical plurality, with various faith communities having different canons and accordingly different Bibles, both in the number of books included and in their order. But the textual form of the books selected in the canons is not a given but something that first has to be established on the basis of either an uncertain decision-making process of textual criticism that eclectically creates one base text out of

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the pluralities offered by the textual evidence or on the basis of Christian and Jewish faith community traditions that have accepted certain forms of the text as God's Word in the course of their long histories.

On top of textual and canonical plurality there is interpretive plurality of the source texts since many passages of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek Scriptures are interpreted differently, both by scholars and in the different faith traditions. This interpretive plurality is itself a multi-layered phenomenon, from lexical pluralities (multiple senses offered by dictionaries) of single words and multiple readings of pericopes or books to different theologies of Scripture and different hermeneutical and exegetical traditions in different scholarly and religious communities.

These canonical, textual and interpretive pluralities of source texts are bewildering and complicated enough for the translator but, just as in the story of Job, the translator, while still shaken by the bad news on the pluralities of text, canon and exegesis, has to cope with more bad news. There are many ways in any language to translate the same passage of Scripture and in major languages such as English there is a wide range of translations available, from very literal to very free and many in between. Yet, there is still more bad news for the translator. There are many ways to be literal (or to be free or to be something in between), as anyone can see who compares a number of literal translations of the Bible.

But is it really bad news that there are so many translations possible and that so many types of Bibles have been created in the long history of Bible translation? Do we need to fear plurality of Bible translations or rather embrace and celebrate it because it reflects the incarnation of God's Word in so many different worlds of language and culture, of church traditions and faith communities? Whether we fear it or embrace it, the plurality of source texts and translation process should be dealt with honestly and explicitly, especially when a Bible translation is undertaken by different communities in a joint effort.

Given these pluralities of text, meaning and translation strategies, how does a translator reach a decision and how does a translator end up with a single translation and what is the role of biblical scholars, faith communities and translators in this decision-making process? Restated in prescriptive terms: how should a translator move from pluralities and possibilities to a single version and what should the roles of academia, church and translators be in the decision-making process? These questions are the focus of my article and my answers are just an introduction to the discussion because nobody can claim to have the final answers to the deep issues of Bible translation.

First, I will suggest some tools to speak more precisely about translation strategies rather than the terms "literal" and "free" by introducing

the distinction between form-oriented, sentence-meaning-oriented and writer's-meaning-oriented strategies. Each of these main types of translation strategies has its own subtypes. Then, I will introduce the *skopos* or function notion to explain why and how translators select certain translation strategies. Finally, the roles of biblical scholars, faith communities and translators are discussed.

II. Translation Strategies and Types

It is possible to distinguish translation types and translation strategies on a linguistic basis¹ and on the basis of the social and cultural functions of translations.²

Let us first consider a linguistic typology of translations. By comparing the linguistic properties of source texts and translated texts, we can give a rough idea of the nature of a translation. Such a typology is descriptively useful but explains little. The social and cultural functions of translations have more explanatory power, as we will see.

To understand the linguistic typology of translations, we need the notion of contextual implication. Contextual implications are inferred by language users solely on the basis of the (verbal, situational, cultural-historical) context of the utterance. When I say "it rained cats and dogs and I am soaked" an obvious inference of the addressee will be that I meant that I am wet *because* of the rain. This causal inference, however, is nowhere expressed in the utterance. It is a contextual implication or inference of causality.

Such gaps between what is meant and what is said constantly occur in normal verbal communication. If speakers or writers would explicate all the information that is normally inferred by addressees, they would need very many, boring and needless words to get simple messages across. Apart from this quantitative reason, there are important qualitative reasons for the gap. If someone calls God his rock, he or she means a whole range of things, a range that cannot be delineated very sharply, a quality of open-endedness that is precisely the point of using a metaphor. Utterances do not *express* what people want to communicate but rather they *mediate* speakers' intentions within a given context shared between speaker/writer and audience.

The causal inference in the example "it rained cats and dogs and I am soaked" is not part of the meaning of the sentence in a narrower, semantic sense. The addressees cannot claim that the speaker *said* the

¹ L. de Vries, "Bible Translations: Forms and Functions," *The Bible Translator* 52 (2001): 306-20.

² C. Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997), 45-52.

rain was the cause of his being wet. They can claim that he *meant* that the rain was the cause because of the context.³ Contextual implications have two characteristics that make them tricky for translators. First, when the translator no longer has direct access to the original utterance context (primary context), it becomes hard to establish what the contextual implications of an utterance are. In the case of ancient texts like those in the Bible, access to the primary context is extremely limited. Furthermore, not all contextual implications have the same status; some are strong while others are weak. In fact, some contextual implications are so weak that we are not sure whether they are writer/speaker-intended implications at all. In the exegetical process of reconstructing the contextual implications of a biblical utterance, inevitably there is interpretive interference from the historical, theological and cultural context of the translator.

The second source of difficulties is this: given that a translator has established what the contextual implications are and how strong they are, as soon as the translator explicates contextual implications, a new series of difficulties emerges since in the process of explication, the information is essentially changed. As Gutt⁴ showed, it is now *asserted* information having its own contextual implications and the explication causes changes in *focality and emphasis* in the message.

In all translations there are unavoidable shifts in the area of contextual implications. Some implications become explicit in the translation and explicated elements from the source become contextually implied in the translation. The structural differences between languages cause thousands of such shifts in translations. For example, Indonesian does not have number distinctions in nouns but Greek does. This leads to shifts from explicated number meanings in the source (singular/plural) to contextually implied number information in the translation. Whatever the function of a Bible translation, such shifts cannot be avoided. However, there are also many situations in which it is up to the translator to decide whether or not and to which extent contextual implications of the source become explicit in the translation.

³ H. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics* (ed. P. Cole and J. Morgan; New York: Academic Press, 1975), 3:41-58, gave the distinction between sentence meaning and writer's/speaker's meaning (contextual implications, contextually interpreted intentions) a definitive place in semantic theory. E. A. Gutt, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 1-271, formulates some major consequences of the Gricean distinctions as elaborated in D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance, Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 1-274, for translation theory.

⁴ Gutt, *Translation and Relevance*, 1-271.

The gap in normal, unmarked primary communication between what is meant and what is expressed, should not be confused with deliberate, intended polyinterpretability. When I say, “it rained and I am soaked,” I trust that you infer the causal relationship and I do not intend to leave open any other interpretations than that the rain caused my being soaked. Intended polyinterpretability is the exception, not the rule and in most speech communities it is linked to certain genres of texts like some types of poetry or other marked forms of language.

By choosing specific lexical, morphosyntactic and other devices, speakers and writers of all languages can manage and adjust levels of explication and implication in their utterances. Adnominal genitives in the New Testament are famous for their low level of explication. The adnominal genitive merely predicates that there is a meaningful relation between the (pro)noun in the genitive and the head nominal. It is up to the addressee to infer the nature of that relation in the context of the utterance. When New Testament writers want to increase the level of explication, they may choose and indeed do choose more specific morphosyntactic devices. Compare the more explicit *tēn ek theou dikaiōsunēn*, “the righteousness from God” in Philippians 3:9a containing the source preposition *ek* with the more implicit adnominal genitive in Romans 1:17, *dikaiōsunē theou*, “righteousness of God.”

Now consider the phrase *en prautēti sophias* in James 3:13 (literally: with humility/gentleness of wisdom). The genitive *sophias* expresses only the fact that wisdom somehow qualifies the humility (or gentleness) and the author leaves it to his readers to infer the specific nature of that qualification. In terms of the explication/implication balance, translators into Dutch have a number of options.⁵ The first would be to choose a construction in Dutch with more or less the same level of explication:

- (a) met wijze zachtmoedigheid/nederigheid
(with wise gentleness/humility)

The second option would be something like (b) which changes the level of explication rather drastically:

- (b) met zachtmoedigheid/nederigheid die uit wijsheid voortkomt
(with gentleness/humility that comes from wisdom)

Now translations of type (a) and (b) differ crucially in terms of the division of interpretive labour: (a) leaves it to the reader to infer the

⁵ For the sake of illustrating the argument I discuss the translation of biblical phrases in isolation, without taking into account the translation of the verses, pericopes and books that they are part of.

precise ways in which wisdom qualifies the humility while (b) explicates the relation between humility and wisdom as one of source: humility comes from wisdom. Therefore, translation of type (b) explicate contextual implications of the source text since the source text does not state that humility or gentility comes from wisdom. In transforming possible and indeed likely contextual implications into expressed information in the translation, in changing what was *possibly meant* in the source into what is *positively asserted* in the translation, the nature of the information essentially changes. The source relation between wisdom and humility becomes much more focal in the translated text than in the original. Also, the translator takes the responsibility for presenting the contextually implied source relation as asserted information.

Although all languages have ranges of constructions that allow language users to manage levels of explication, it is dangerous to assume from superficial formal similarities across languages that constructions of similar form can be used for the same things. For example, it would be dangerous to equate the Greek adnominal genitives with Dutch adnominal *van* phrases. Although there are functional overlaps, there are also usages of the New Testament Greek adnominal genitive which are impossible in Dutch, for example the (semiticising) usage of the genitive to express a quality of the referent of the head nominal as in *huios tēs anomias*, literally “son of lawlessness.” Therefore, choosing target language forms with comparable levels of explication and implication as source forms is something very different from translating literally or translating with the aim to create maximal formal correspondence with the source.

Another danger in the translational analysis of New Testament genitives is the lack of distinction between the sentence (or phrase) meaning of the adnominal genitive construction and in principle its unlimited number of contextually inferrable interpretations (contextual implications). Because of its function as a generic construction, the only meaning signaled by the adnominal genitive is this: the head nominal A and the genitival nominal B stand in a meaningful relationship and the addressee is kindly requested to sort out that relationship given the context. By calling all sorts of possible contextual interpretations of the adnominal genitive *meanings* signaled by that form, translators may feel forced to *express* those meanings independent of the function of the translation and independent of the reasons why the author chose a highly generic construction. In doing so they would skip the methodological preliminary issue of choosing appropriate levels of explication given the function of the translation project.

The point of translation (a) (“with wise humility” for *en prautēti sophias* in James 3:13) is not that it is closer to the source form than (b) (“with humility that comes from wisdom”). Both (a) and (b) deviate

from the morphosyntax of the Greek phrase. A formal equivalence type of rendering in Dutch would be solution (c) in which the preposition *van* signals the genitive case:

- (c) met zachtmoedigheid van wijsheid
(with gentleness of wisdom)

In translation (c) Greek nouns have been translated with Dutch nouns, and the Greek order of those nouns is also retained. Solutions of type (c) could be called form oriented, of type (b) writer's-meaning or interpretation oriented and of type (a) sentence-meaning oriented. Notice that I employ the distinction sentence-meaning and writer's-meaning/interpretation here in the sense of Grice as outlined above. Translations of type (c) that concentrate on the form of the source and translations of type (a) that focus on the expressed meanings of the source *both* keep closer to the Greek form than interpretation-oriented versions. If one thinks in a dichotomy of free versus literal translations, types (a) and (c) could easily be lumped together as "literal" translations. This would not do justice to the essential differences between them. The aim of (a) is not to stay close to the *form* but to the *expressed meanings* of the source, leaving contextual implications to the reader to infer. For example, whereas form-oriented translations try to translate nouns with nouns, and verbs with verbs, keeping word categories constant across languages is not at all a goal of type (a) translations. Also, translating a source word with the same target word all the time irrespective of contextually determined senses of words, just to reflect the lexical form of the source, is not an aim of type (a) translations whereas such concordance or verbal consistency is a typical aim of form-oriented translations.

It is clear that sentence-meaning-oriented translations of type (a) that leave a lot of interpretive work to the readers or listeners, are harder to understand and less accessible. On the other hand, such translations suffer less from the interpretive inference from the translators' theological and cultural context that is unavoidable in interpretation-oriented or writer's-meaning-oriented translations that explicate contextual implications of complex texts of antiquity for which the primary contexts have become inaccessible. Form-oriented translations are hardest to understand since they not only leave a lot of interpretive work to the reader but also suffer from lexical and morphosyntactic interference from the source language.

Translations that spell out contextual implications for certain audiences and certain functions may do so in order to help the reader to construe the relationships between elements in a complex text, like the source relationship between humility and wisdom in James 3:13 (cf.

NIV: “humility that comes from wisdom”). Another motivation behind explicating contextually implied information is to guide the reader to the right referents of phrases in the source, to prevent misunderstandings. Take translations of the phrase *hoi Ioudaioi*, “the Jews” that narrow down the range of reference in the translation by using phrases like “the Jewish leaders” in contexts where translations with “the Jews” sound anti-Jewish to modern ears. Again, it is the function or *skopos* of the translation in the target community that should be the basis for the translational decision. For a common language translation, explicating the intended ranges of reference of *hoi Ioudaioi* would be appropriate as it prevents unintended anti-Jewish readings among uninformed readers. For a church translation, I would prefer “the Jews” in most cases since most church communities would be able and would want to carry out such interpretive tasks themselves. Notice that, again, explicating contextually implied referents essentially changes the nature of the information: the generalising overtones of the *hoi Ioudaioi* phrase (possibly reflecting Church and Synagogue conflicts)⁶ are lost and the translation now asserts that the Jewish leaders, and not others, did so and so.

Each of these three main types of translation has many subtypes because there are many ways in which one can translate a text with a form, sentence-meaning, or writer’s-meaning oriented strategy.

Take the form-oriented strategy, commonly called literalism in translation studies. One can be form oriented in the following ways:

- (a) *Literalism at phrase and sentence level, syntactic interference.* Order of words and syntactic rules of source language are transferred to translation. For example the Dutch *Statenvertaling* (1637) which has literalism also at the level of phrase and sentence because it was thought that the order of words was also inspired by the Holy Spirit. De Brune, a Calvinist with a good knowledge of the Hebrew text remarks in 1644 that “the new translators have expressed the Hebrew text so precise and close that they also often followed the order and position of the words...because of which the sense was not expressed all that clear and fluent.”⁷ The extreme syntactic interference from the biblical languages can be seen in the translation of I Cor 12:3, “ende niemant en kan seggen Jesum den Heere [te

⁶ P. Ellingworth, “Translating the Language of Leadership,” *The Bible Translator* 49 (1998): 128.

⁷ C. C. de Bruin and F. G. M. Broeyer, *De Statenbijbel en zijn voorgangers* (Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbel Genootschap, 1993), 308: “de Nieuwe Over-zetters den Hebreuwsen text zoo gantsch nauw end’ nae hebben uytghedruckt, dat zy oock veeltijds de ordre end’ stellinghe der woorden hebben naeghevolght... waerdeur de zin niet zoo klaer end’ onbekommert wert uytghedruckt.”

zijn],” where the *Statenvertaling* follows the Greek syntax *oudeis dunatai eipein*; *Kurios Iēsous*, “nobody can say that Jesus is Lord” and adds *te zijn* “to be” between brackets in an effort to repair some of the problems created by the word-by-word translation.

- (b) *Literalism at level of parts of speech*. Nouns, verbs, participles are translated as nouns, verbs, participles, and so forth.
- (c) *Literalism at lexical level*. Verbal consistency/concordant translation or stereotyping: a given source text word is always translated with the same target word in the translation, e.g. *sarx*=flesh in all or most occurrences, e.g., KJV.
- (d) *Literalism at the level of function words*. Very rare, usually literalism is restricted to content words, not function words. The classical example here is Aquila’s revision (around 125 CE) of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Aquila’s notion of “Bible,” derived from his teacher Akiba, “determined that every letter and word in the Bible is meaningful. Aquila therefore made an attempt to represent accurately every word, particle, and even morpheme in his translation. For example, he translated every Hebrew *nota accusative* (object marker) כִּי with *συν* ‘with’, apparently on the basis of the other meaning of כִּי , namely ‘with’.”⁸
- (e) *Literalism at level of morphemes or parts of words*, that is below word level, e.g. in the LXX according to Sysling:⁹ “In the Greek translation, literalness is sometimes based on semantic representation of elements that lie below the word level, either to parts of words or to morphemes which have only grammatical or word-formational function in the original.”¹⁰ Or in other words, the constituents of Hebrew words are represented in individual Greek equivalents.¹¹ As an example of such segmentation we may give the rendering of a temporal clause in 2 Samuel 5:24, where “all the constituents of the Hebrew word are represented separately by their usual equivalents in the LXX: $\text{כִּי תִשְׁמָעוּ בְּעוֹזְרוֹתַי}$ εν τῶ ἀκούσάί σε”¹² (when you hear). Literalism at root level is found in the famous German translation by Buber and Rosenzweig, e.g. in 1 Kings 12:1 $\text{לִהְיוֹת הַיָּהוָה}$ (inf. constr. *hifil*, root:

⁸ E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 146.

⁹ H. Sysling, “Translation Techniques in the Ancient Bible Translations: Septuagint and Targum,” in *A History of Bible Translation* (ed. P. Noss; Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007), 279-305.

¹⁰ J. Barr, *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Translations* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979), 300.

¹¹ E. Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1997), 23. Barr calls this process “division into elements or segments.”

¹² Tov, *Text-Critical Use*, 23.

מלך), “ihn zu königen” in ungrammatical German (literally “to king him”) where Luther has grammatical German “um ihn zum König zu machen” (to make him king).¹³

In actual form-oriented translations, we find different mixes of these five types of literalism, some types more often than others, and never consistently. A linguistic comparison of translations and source texts always reveals such inconsistencies, that is, a given strategy is never followed in a consistent manner. Let us take the LXX. Scholars studying the LXX have long been aware of its inconsistencies. Sysling writes, “One aspect of literalness, and perhaps the most conspicuous one, is consistency in the use of translation equivalents. In this respect, the Septuagint is quite uneven. On the one hand, one may say that ‘from the outset a tendency towards stereotyping was the rule rather than the exception.’¹⁴ On the other hand, many examples of inconsistency can be shown. In Genesis 3:19, to give only one example, one sees inconsistency in the use of verbs and nouns. The Greek translators do not distinguish here between the Hebrew words for ‘ground’ and ‘dust’, and . . . they give different renderings where the Hebrew has twice ‘return’.”¹⁵

Although the linguistic typology with its types and subtypes is useful to describe the very real and important differences between the literalness of for example Buber’s literal German translation and the literalness of the Dutch *Statenvertaling*, it does not explain them, nor does it explain the inconsistencies in applying the literal method. Why would Buber want to reflect the morphological patterns of Hebrew, based on (normally) three root consonants per word? Why did my Dutch ancestors want to reflect the syntax of Greek constructions such as the *accusativus cum infinitivo*? And why are LXX translators inconsistent in their strategy to be verbally consistent (i.e., stereotyping: always the same target word for a given source word)? To explain the linguistic facts found in comparing translations we must turn to the social, religious and cultural *functions* of translations as Bibles in the various communities.

III. Functions and Translation Strategies

We just saw that form orientedness or literalism has many linguistic subtypes. Sometimes, literalism concentrates just on words, sometimes on levels higher or lower than words. Moreover, even if literalism is

¹³ The example is from prof. Judith Frishmann given in a lecture at the occasion of the presentation of the Tanach edition of the Dutch New Bible Translation (NBV), Utrecht 19 September 2007.

¹⁴ Sysling cites Tov, *Text-Critical Use*, 20.

¹⁵ Sysling, “Translation Techniques,” 279-305.

concentrated on certain aspects of the source while ignoring others, we see that translators are never consistent in their literalism. From these examples we can see the limited usefulness of linguistic typologies of translations. When we call a translation form-oriented or literal, we are still confronted with many ways and levels of form orientedness and also with inconsistencies that are unexplained. It is only when we turn to the social, cultural and theological functions of translations in target communities, that is, to the *skopos*, that we understand why translation A has a different literalness from translation B, and why A and B are inconsistent in different places.

The notion of the *skopos* of a Bible translation is often associated with specific functions or with special audiences that Bible translations may have, like study Bibles, common language translations, liturgical translations, Bibles for children, for Muslims, and so on. Although such specific functional elements belong to the *skopos* of Bible translations, the core of the *skopos* of Bible translations is formed by theological and hermeneutic elements that define the notion “Bible” for a given community and that emerge from the specific spirituality of that community. Such complex and sometimes implicit notions of “Bible” define the target or goal of every new translation.

The various Jewish and Christian communities have created their own Bibles in the course of their histories of translation. These creative translation histories involve the selection of textual traditions, of books to be included in the Bible, views on the relationship between the human authors and the Divine Author of the Bible, and different answers to the crucial question of the hermeneutical division of labour between tradition/Church, individual believer and Bible translation.

Such basic assumptions about the Bible determine how the Bible functions in the various communities and form the framework to further define notions as “study Bible” or “Church Bible.” In the case of missionary translations in situations where communities do not have (yet) a notion of “Bible” or “Holy Book” and have not asked for a Bible, the *skopos* is initially determined solely by the missionary and his or her missionary organization.

Arguments for or against specific Bible translations are often formulated in translational, philological or linguistic terms disguising the real objections or preferences that follow from theological and hermeneutic notions of “Bible.” For example, terms like “literal” and “dynamic” originate in the discourse of translation studies but often function in a basically hermeneutic discourse and refer to theological issues like the division of interpretive labour between church, individual believer and Bible translator. As soon as one compares different “literal” or “free” translations of the Bible it becomes clear that there are many ways to be

literal or free, and that these types of “literalness” or “dynamicity” are connected to theological, hermeneutical *skopos* factors.

Let us take the famous German translation of Buber and Rosenzweig, which is a form-oriented translation that focuses also on the consonant roots of Hebrew verbs, the so-called root concordance. But why this focus on roots, morphological patterns of words? The *skopos* or function of this translation explains why. Buber and Rosenzweig were German Jews who wanted to make a Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible for the German Jewish faith communities in the first half of the twentieth century. Luther’s German translation, dominant in Germany, was seen as a Protestant translation that did not convey the Jewishness of the Hebrew Bible. According to Van der Louw¹⁶ and Frishmann,¹⁷ this Jewishness was understood by Buber and Rosenzweig in the context of ideas about language, ethnicity and identity that were very widespread in Germany in their time and that had their roots in nineteenth-century German Romanticism and nationalism. The idea was that every people (*Volk*) had a characteristic mentality or spirit (*Geist*) expressed in their language (*Sprache*). Especially in the works of Herder, this unity of *Volk*, *Geist* and *Sprache* was emphasized. Of course, in an emerging nation-state (Germany as a nation-state was forged out of hundreds of smaller political and ethnic units) the political elite had an interest in using the national language as a tool to create national unity and to present the German language as a carrier of an (assumed) national culture. Now, Buber and Rosenzweig assumed that there was a Hebrew *Geist* or mentality expressed in the Hebrew language and a Jewish translation should express that typical Hebrew *Geist* in the forms of the German language. The root structures of the Hebrew language were thought to express this Hebrew *Geist* and therefore they tried to convey that in the German translation. According to Van der Louw,¹⁸ the influence of Schleiermacher on German translation views is also important to understand Buber’s translation type. Schleiermacher had the idea that the Holy Writ should be translated in the form of poetry, from Genesis to Revelation, and Buber puts this into practice. Buber and Rosenzweig were both German and Jew and their translation reflects the German cultural and intellectual environment of their day in their views of language and translation. At the same time they were Jews, translating for the Jewish community in Germany that wanted another type of Bible over Luther’s, a Bible closer to the structures and thought patterns of the Hebrew original. Because

¹⁶ T. Van der Louw, “Vertalen volgens de Duitse romanti (Schleiermacher, Buber) en soorten letterlijkheid,” *Kerk en Theologie* 57 (2006): 59-79.

¹⁷ See note 13.

¹⁸ Van der Louw, “Vertalen,” 59-79.

of the rabbinic exegetical traditions, the translation also reflects rabbinical readings of the Hebrew Bible not found in Luther's Bible and these rabbinical readings sometimes cause the translators to deviate from their strict literalism. An example given by Frishmann is Exodus 21:24, *'ajin tachat 'ajin*, where Luther is more literal (*Auge um Auge*, eye for eye) and Buber follows the rabbinical reading with his translation (*Augersatz für Auge*, eye compensation for eye) that reflect the Jewish practice of paying compensation money to "replace" the loss of the eye. Again, such inconsistencies follow from the *skopos*, in this case the theological function of the translation in a Jewish community with its particular tradition of reading the text.

So, it is only when we study the function of a translation in its unique cultural and historical circumstances that we can explain the specific linguistic form and subtype of the translation and its (apparent) inconsistencies.

IV. Loyalty, Function and the Ethics of Bible Translation

Notice that from a *skopos* perspective the three main linguistic types of translations, and their subtypes, form oriented, sentence-meaning oriented and writer's-meaning oriented are all equally "good," that is, it does not prescribe a type of translation because it is up to the target communities to decide what the function of the translation is and accordingly to select a translation strategy that fits the required function. This is an important divergence from the functional and dynamic equivalence approaches that tended to reject form-oriented translation types.

This acceptance of all translation types by *skopos* theorists does not mean that anything goes, that anything is permitted in a *skopos* approach to (Bible) translation. For Nord the loyalty principle is an integral part of functionalism.¹⁹ Translators should have an (interpersonal) loyalty to both the writers of the texts they translate and to target audiences they serve. The loyalty to writers of source texts entails that the translator is never allowed to translate in such a way that the translation obviously contradicts the intentions of the writer. In other words, the different functions for target communities allow translators to select certain aspects of the source texts because a single translation can never represent all aspects of the source. However, providing different windows on the same text in different translations is not the same as distorting the obvious intentions of the writers.

Therefore serving target communities, by translating according to desired functions of the translated text (e.g. as Church Bible or Bible for

¹⁹ Nord, *Translating*, 123.

Muslim audiences, etc.) is both a solution and a problem. It is solution for the problem of plurality of source texts and the translation process; only from the perspective of his or her target audience and their needs can a translator in a principled way choose from all the pluralities before him or her.

Take Hebrews 5:7—ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ. This phrase can be translated in several ways, such as “in the days of his flesh,” or as “during his earthly life.” These translations provide two different windows on the same text: one a more form-oriented window and the other conveying the intended meaning of the phrase more clearly. From a *skopos* perspective both translations are equally good in terms of loyalty to the source since they do not violate the intentions of the writer. But in terms of translation function, these renderings are different, the translation type “in the days of his flesh” does not work in a missionary translation in the jungles of interior New Guinea but may work in a study Bible aimed at people who want to come close to the forms of Scripture, including its lexis. So, the function guides the translator here in the process of moving from pluralities to a single translation decision, and the target community needs are a solution to the problem of plurality.

But target community needs may also be a problem when communities force translators to be disloyal to the intentions of the writers of biblical texts. Just one example:

Colossians 3:18: Αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν

NIV: Wives, submit to your husbands...

NIT: Wives, be committed to your husbands...

CEV: A wife must put her husband first...

Both NIT (New Inclusive Translation) and CEV tried to get away from the idea of submission. NIT is clearly disloyal to the intention of the writer of this text. CEV rephrases the idea of submission of the source text in modern relationship terms in a way that, to my mind, also creates tension with the intentions of the writer as reflected in choosing the verb *hupotassomai*. In order to function as a sacred text for modern communities in the West that view men and women as equal partners in marriage translators may be tempted or under pressure to violate the obvious intentions of the Greek text but the *skopos* approach was never meant to justify such violations.

Now some may object that it is not so easy, if not impossible, for translators to establish the intentions of writers. In the case of source texts of which the writers are still around, the translator can ask the writer whether he or she feels that a certain rendering reflects his inten-

tions. However, the more distance in time and place there is, the more difficult it gets to establish the intentions of writers. Therefore, Nord²⁰ has argued, in the case of texts like the Bible, that loyalty to writers implies that translations should be, in my terms, either form-oriented or sentence-meaning oriented rather than writer's meaning oriented.

I would add that if Bible translators choose to make explicit the intended meaning or writer's meaning, that they should make sure that they stay within the scholarly consensus. Take our example *en prautēti sophias* in James 3:13. If translators are not content to represent just the sentence meaning (in this case, phrasal meaning, e.g. "with wise gentility") but want to make explicit the writer's intention they may translate as "gentleness that comes from wisdom." That would be against Nord's view since for her loyalty to writers of very ancient texts, where we can no longer really establish intentions, implies that we refrain from making explicit the intended relation between "wisdom" and "gentility." But if translators make contextual implications explicit, they should check whether their explicitation is within the boundaries of scholarly consensus. This is probably the case with the NIV explicitation—"gentleness that comes from wisdom."

V. Biblical Scholars, Faith Communities and Translators

Finally, the roles of biblical scholars, faith communities and translators are discussed. What should the roles of biblical scholars, translators and faith communities be from a functional perspective?

The role of translators is, first of all, to get a clear idea from the commissioner of the translation project what the *skopos* or function(s) of this particular Bible translation project is. Often commissioners have highly implicit ideas and expectations about the goals of the translation, the type of translation, the audience, and the translation strategies to be followed. Therefore, translators should force commissioners to become more explicit. A good way to do this is by producing short test translations of selected passages and to ask which of the test versions they like best. Of course, the commissioner will turn to representatives of the audience and/or to market research to get answers to the questions of the intended *skopos* of the project. Often, the *skopos* is established in a process of negotiation between stakeholders culminating in a memorandum that states the translation brief.

If the functional goals are clear enough, the actual translation work can start once a translation team has been formed, with both biblical scholars and translators in the translation team and representatives of

²⁰ Nord, *Translating*, 126.

audiences and faith communities in the supervising committee. Translators, to be sure, can be biblical scholars but if so they have to separate their roles of translator and biblical scholar.

The role of representatives of target communities is to monitor the progress of the translation from the perspective of the functions of the translation projects and of the perspective of loyalty to the writers of the source texts, to see whether the emerging translation indeed is the type of translation agreed on in the translation brief and whether the translation does not violate scholarly consensus on the exegesis of the source text.

In the introduction I sketched translation as a process that starts with pluralities and indeterminacies of canon, textual criticism and meaning and ends with a single translation. The role of biblical scholars in the translation team is to present the pluralities and indeterminacies of the source text including the range of scholarly readings of the text and to eliminate translation proposals that go against scholarly consensus.

It is essential that biblical scholars understand the nature of the translation process as necessarily selective and as *skopos*-driven. A single translation can never represent all aspects of the source and a translator has to choose between legitimate readings of the source or target language renderings that are often equally defensible. Faced with these pluralities, it is the role and noble burden of the translator, and also his or her specific skill, to choose on the basis of the function of the translation as formulated in the translation brief.

Things go wrong when biblical scholars prefer another type of translation with a different *skopos* than the translation type formulated in the translation brief. For example, when a biblical scholar with a preference for, say, a form-oriented translation that focuses on the word level including verbal consistency, is part of a translation team that prepares a missionary translation for an audience that knows nothing of the Bible. Or when a Catholic scholar (or a Protestant or any other tradition) in an interconfessional project prefers a translation that can be used in the liturgical tradition of his own faith community and that reflects the reading traditions of his own community. Usually, scholars dress their arguments in the clothes of biblical scholarship in such cases but the truth is that they want another translation type.

Things go also wrong when translators do not respect the role of biblical scholars as gatekeepers that draw the exegetical boundaries within which the translator might choose or when translators, under pressure from target communities translate in ways that violate scholarly consensus on the legitimate readings of the text.

Let me illustrate these roles of faith communities, biblical scholars and translators with a well-known translation problem of the Hebrew Bible, the tetragrammaton YHWH. I take my example from an actual translation project that was completed in 2004, the new Dutch Interconfessional Translation. This Bible was intended to serve two functions. First, it was to be used by all major faith communities in the Netherlands. Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholics sent their representatives to the supervising committee. This was the first Dutch Bible ever with an interconfessional *skopos*. Second, it was intended to function as the Bible for those who see it as an important work of antiquity, and who want the translation to convey its various literary genres and styles as well as its cultural backgrounds, or in short to serve a literary and cultural function.

The role of the biblical scholars was to point out the pluralities and indeterminacies surrounding the tetragrammaton. They presented the indeterminacy of the vocalization of this name: “Yahweh” is basically a scholarly reconstruction based on first-century Greek transcriptions. This vocalization was regarded as the most probable by the biblical scholars in the translation, following Gesenius who argued this in 1824. Then they presented the indeterminacy and pluralities of the exegesis of this name, that is the multiple scholarly readings of the meaning of YHWH (e.g., I am the One who is, He is there, I am there, I cause to become, etc.). There was also consensus among the scholars that YHWH is first of all the proper name of the central character of the Hebrew Bible. Then the biblical scholars turned to the fact that in post-exilic times name taboos affected the performing of the text in source communities leading to a separation of what was written (YHWH) from what was to be read aloud (*Adonai*) and that the avoidance replacement *Adonai* via its LXX translation *kurios*, and its daughter translations, came to function as a proper name in many translations and target communities (e.g. Dutch *Statenvertaling* ‘HEERE’). On the basis of the input of the biblical scholars a list of possible Dutch renderings was produced:

- vocalised proper name; Dutch *Jahweh* or *Jahwe* (cf. major translations such as Dutch Willibrord Vertaling 1975 and Bible de Jérusalem 1961)
- four consonant “Dutch Tetragrammaton”: JHWH
- translate according to “meaning”; proposals Ík-ben-er’; ‘Hij-is-er’ (I am there, He is there)
- transliterate the Qere: *Adonai*
- follow the common Jewish and Christian reading and translation tradition initiated in the LXX with *kurios* (LORD, HEER[E])

-options from Jewish reading traditions such as *De Naam* (the Name) or *De Eeuwige* (the Eternal)

Once the pluralities and possibilities were lined up by the biblical scholars, the translators looked at the possibilities from the point of view of the *skopos* of the project, having received input from the supervising committees.

In an interconfessional translation *Jahwe(h)* is not an option because of the Jewish communities that the translation wanted to serve, apart from the uncertainty of vocalization. Seen from the perspective of the literary function of this Bible, *Jahwe(h)* would be the best choice because it reflects the undeniable fact that it is first and foremost a proper name of the main character and should be translated as such. JHWH with vowels left out was rejected by the translators because target communities would have no idea why the central character of the book would be identified with just four unpronounceable letters. Were these His initials or what? JHWH was too exoticizing for the broad interconfessional function of this Bible. Translation according to the meaning of the Tetragrammaton were discussed but consensus on the meaning was difficult to reach: over a hundred proposals reached the Netherlands Bible Society and it soon became clear that the broad interconfessional function ruled out a translation of the meaning that satisfied only some segments of the target audience but estranged others. After this *skopos*-based elimination process the HEER (LORD) option was the only one left and that choice ended up in the translation.

This example illustrates well the roles of faith communities, biblical scholars and translators. The biblical scholars line up the pluralities, indeterminacies and possibilities, the faith communities specify how the name of God functions in their communities, and the translators choose from the (legitimate) range of options the one translation that fits best. Of course, in a Dutch translation with a different *skopos*, other choices would have been made and in fact have been made. In other words, there is not one, single “good” translation of the tetragrammaton; what is a good translation depends on both the (legitimate) possible readings of the source text and the function of the translation. A good translation selects from those offered by the biblical scholars the option that best fits the translation function as described in the translation brief.

VI. Conclusion

We investigated the roles and place of the various stakeholders in Bible translation projects, especially biblical scholars, translators and representatives of faith communities. Our investigation was guided by

the *skopos* or goal-oriented approach to Bible translation. From this perspective translating the Bible is a complex decision-making process that starts with pluralities and indeterminacies on various levels and ends with a single translation that can serve specific audiences with specific types of translations. To get a clear idea of the types of Bible translations, we discussed two typologies of translations, one on a linguistic basis and the other on the basis of the functions of translations for target communities.

The role of translators is to get a clear idea from the commissioner of the translation project as to what the *skopos* or function(s) of this particular Bible translation project is. The *skopos* is established in a process of negotiation between stakeholders culminating in a memorandum that states the translation brief including the type of translation agreed upon, preferably with example translations of certain chapters. If the functional goals are clear enough for all parties, the actual translation work can start and it is the task of the translator to choose and select from the legitimate pluralities defined by biblical scholars those translations that best serve the *skopos* of the particular translation project.

The role of biblical scholars is to present the pluralities and indeterminacies of the source text, including the range of accepted readings of the text, and to eliminate translation proposals that go against scholarly consensus. It is essential that biblical scholars understand the nature of the translation process as necessarily selective and as a *skopos*-driven form of communication with specific audiences in a certain time and a certain place. If biblical scholars do not understand the nature of the translation process, their discussions with translators will end in misunderstandings and distrust. Translators, for their part, have to accept the authority of biblical scholars in drawing the boundaries between translation proposals that are within or outside scholarly consensus. In cases of doubt or lack of scholarly consensus on the side of the source texts, it is the role of the biblical scholars to advise the translation team when deciding on the issue.

The role of representatives of faith communities is to monitor the progress of the translation from the perspective of the *skopos* of the translation projects and from the perspective of loyalty to the writers of the source texts, to see whether the emerging translation indeed is the type of translation agreed on in the translation brief and whether the translation does not violate scholarly consensus on the exegesis of the source text.