

# **Bible Translation as Cultural Interchange: Rendering the Foreign in Minority Languages**

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**Key words:** foreignisation, invisibility, Bible translation, translation studies, skopos theory

**Abstract:** The concept of foreignisation in Translation Studies was given fresh impetus in an influential 1995 publication by Lawrence Venuti titled *The Translator's Invisibility*, which has since become established as one of the key texts in the field. Venuti's usage of the word "invisibility" refers to the prevailing position and methodology among contemporary British and American translators for an ethnocentric, domesticating translation strategy. For the most part, Venuti explored the translation of foreign texts into English but this article considers another aspect: the translation of the Bible by Western translators into minority languages. Venuti's overall package of translation ethics – together with important contributions from German functionalists in the form of skopos theory – provides some important reminders for the development of vernacular Bibles in minority cultures. This article is especially relevant to Evangelicals interested in how aspects of cultural studies have introduced new concepts relevant to the practice of Bible translation. More widely, this paper may also be of interest to Evangelicals engaged in cross-cultural ministry.

## *THE "CULTURAL TURN" IN TRANSLATION STUDIES*

Bible translation theory enjoys a long and illustrious history stretching as far back as the Septuagint and the works of St Jerome through pioneers such as William Tyndale and Martin Luther to 20th century theorists, of whom the most notable is Eugene Nida. Unfortunately there is a growing gulf between the prevailing viewpoints of contemporary Bible translators and those from the field of Translation Studies. Much of Bible translation theory is based on linguistic concepts of equivalence in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s but which are largely disregarded in Translation Studies where, by contrast, a much more 'cultural' approach to translation is the norm.

In the 1980s, Translation Studies underwent what became known as the 'cultural turn' which radically altered prevailing method and theory. There is a strong need for Bible translation to enter into this kind of culture-based, target audience-oriented, re-examination of the approaches to translation. One of the most pressing problems in Bible translation is the assumption that minority cultures require only domesticating, idiomatic translations, which are simple to read and which avoid or smooth over foreign ideas in the source text. This

dominant viewpoint needs to be challenged and there ought to be recognition that in certain situations, different societies, regardless of their cultural values and worldview, might expect to receive a Bible translation that places the reader nearer to the source culture. The evidence and explanation for this will follow but a good place to start the discussion is the concept of *foreignisation*, which ought to be much better understood among Bible translators.

In Translation Studies, foreignisation is a concept mostly associated with Lawrence Venuti who understands it as a deliberate translation strategy of breaking target culture customs by retaining a sense of the 'otherness' of a source text. This is not just a matter of linguistic principle but for Venuti extends to ethical and social grounds:

I want to suggest that insofar as foreignising translation seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation, it is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others. Foreignising translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations.<sup>1</sup>

Why is the notion of ethical or social responsibility now seen as important in Translation Studies? The answer lies in the so-called 'cultural turn' of the 1980s, which transformed the study of translation from a question of simple linguistic equivalence to a larger platform of cross-cultural interaction. As Theo Hermans put it, "Translation used to be regarded primarily in terms of relations between texts, or between language systems. Today it is increasingly seen as a complex transaction taking place in a communicative, socio-cultural context. This requires that we bring the translator as a social being fully into the picture."<sup>2</sup> Translation is no longer restricted to mere linguistic recoding and there has been a recognition that social, psychological, political as well as cultural factors come into play. Leo Hickey has remarked that, "It is also becoming clear that, as in any other form of rewriting ... [translation] ... implies manipulation and relates directly to ideology, power, value systems and perceptions of reality."<sup>3</sup>

Today, Translation Studies scholars tend to understand translation as much more than simple linguistic recoding. As Mary Snell Hornby stated in 1988, translation should not be defined or restricted to activity between languages but

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<sup>1</sup> Venuti, Lawrence, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Second edition, London and New York: 2008, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Hermans, Theo, 'Norms and the Determination of Translation: A Theoretical Framework' in Alvarez Rodríguez, Román, and M. Carmen Africa Vidal, *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Clevedon, Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Hickey 'Introduction', in Leo Hickey, ed. *The Pragmatics of Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998:1.

should be seen as a larger interaction between cultures.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly Translation Studies is no longer seen as a sub-branch of linguistics but as an interdiscipline borrowing heavily from Cultural Studies and Anthropology. Of particular interest in this article is the consideration of target culture needs and expectations. Indeed, an entire branch of the discipline known as Descriptive Translation Studies has been particularly influential in directing the study of translation to the target culture, recognising the mediating role of translators between cultural relationships.<sup>5</sup> Bible translators ought to be encouraged to consider the developments in translation theory introduced since the cultural turn.

Venuti's work on invisibility included a number of matters such as copyright ownership of translated texts and the problem of marginalising translators. It also offered a methodology for assessing translations. Not all of these aspects are particularly relevant to the matter of Bible translation where the most important part of Venuti's invisibility framework is the notion of foreignisation, a term derived from Friedrich Schleiermacher.<sup>6</sup>

Venuti, along with Antoine Berman, adds an ethical slant to Schleiermacher's idea by offering it as a means to challenge the prevailing translation practice of the West whereby the foreignness or 'otherness' of the source text is lost. It is precisely this dissolution of the original source text's alien features that Venuti attempts to avoid with the strategy of foreignisation. In much of contemporary Western translation theory, and particularly Bible translation theory, the dominant practice is to smother the other-worldliness of the source text and produce a seamlessly domesticating translation.<sup>7</sup> Any clues about the foreign origins of the text have been largely hidden in the fluency of its new guise:

Fluency can be seen as a discursive strategy ideally suited to domesticating translation, capable not only of executing the ethnocentric violence of domestication, but also of concealing this violence by producing the effect of transparency, the illusion that this is not a translation, but the foreign texts, in fact, the living thoughts of the foreign author.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Snell Hornby, *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Toury, Gideon, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 'On the Different Methods of Translating', trans. S. Bernofsky, in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. Second edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, 43-63.

<sup>7</sup> See for example the classic texts on dynamic equivalence that remain highly influential in Bible translation circles: Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964; Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Venuti, Lawrence, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Second edition. London and New York: 2008, 50.

There is overlap here with much of the work that derives from postcolonial translation studies. Consider the following statement by Gayatri Spivak in which the problem of "translatese" may occur also in Bible translation if an illusion is created whereby the writings of Isaiah or Paul begins to resemble the feel of an everyday speaker in the particular missionary context for which translation is being made:

In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it translatese so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan.<sup>9</sup>

The ethical point is this: that a domesticating translation can lead to what Venuti calls an ethnocentric violence of translation. In Bible translation, it can lead to target cultures that are largely unaware of the rich tapestry of Jewish background (and to a lesser extent of Greco-Roman background). The effect of domesticating translation is that simple fluency and easy transparency cast an illusion that the translated text is not actually a translation, but the original, as if the original writer(s) sited and targeted the text in the target culture itself.

A domesticating strategy is not merely a matter of linguistic categories but includes the removal or avoidance of ideas or statements that might be offensive to the target culture. In French neo-classical translations of Homer, concerns about 'uncouth' or earthly descriptions of the entrails of humans and animals meant that entire passages were left untranslated. Such was the dominance of this domesticating ideology of Homeric translation that few were aware of the original's description of bodily parts. When the 19th-century French poet Leconte de Lisle attempted a fresh translation of Homer without censorship around 150 years later, he was criticised for misrepresenting the original.<sup>10</sup>

#### *DOMESTICATION IN BIBLE TRANSLATION*

There are plenty of examples of domestication in English Bible translation.<sup>11</sup> There may not have been an explicit Venutian domesticating strategy as such, but

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<sup>9</sup> Spivak, G. 'The Politics of Translation', in L. Venuti, ed. *The Translation Studies Reader*. Second edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, 371-2.

<sup>10</sup> Lefevere, André, 'Why Waste Our Time on Rewrites: The Trouble with Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm' in Theo Hermans ed. *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*. London: Croon Helm, 1985, 215-43.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to realise that although it is convenient to think of foreignisation and domestication as simple binary opposites similar to the literal/free or formal/dynamic dichotomies, they are in fact slightly different because they are at their core ethical considerations. In addition, although I often place literal and foreignising together, this is mainly for convenience. Literalness is not always an appropriate method of avoiding ethnocentrism.

the effects are much the same whether intentionally domesticating or not. This is the case even in translations normally considered to be literal or foreignising. For example, the Authorised Version (1611) anachronistically renders the Greek *pascha* as 'Easter' in Acts 12:4 even though the word is a transliteration (via Aramaic) of the Hebrew *pesach* meaning Passover.

One of the prevailing viewpoints among contemporary Bible translators is that missionary societies require domesticating Bible translations such as those produced by dynamic equivalence. Such translations are typically easy to read, free rather than literal, and often smooth over foreign objects or ambiguities in the text. We might call this dominant assumption a 'supermeme' (to borrow Chesterman's concept of translation memes<sup>12</sup>) since it is a highly pervasive influence that appears repeatedly and too often uncritically. The words of Don Carson are typical of Bible translation theorists (and which, incidentally, are a world away from the views of contemporary Translation Studies theorists):

There is widespread recognition of the primacy of dynamic equivalence (increasingly referred to as 'functional equivalence') as the best controlling model in Bible translation.<sup>13</sup>

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To conclude the consideration of this translation feature, dynamic (or functional) equivalence has largely triumphed, and rightly so.<sup>14</sup>

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Nevertheless, it is true to say that functional-equivalence theory has a dominant place in the thinking of Bible translators around the world, especially those who work in the receptor languages remarkably different from either the Indo-European or Semitic languages in which most people in the West have been nurtured.<sup>15</sup>

This is not the place to begin an assessment of dynamic equivalence theory but suffice to say that it is largely disregarded by modern Translation Studies scholars. This illustrates the gap that exists between Bible Translation theory and Translation Studies theory. A comprehensive discussion on dynamic equivalence

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<sup>12</sup> Chesterman, Andrew, *Memes of Translation*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Carson, Donald A. 'New Bible Translations: an Assessments and Prospect' in Howard Clark Kee, *The Bible in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: American Bible Society, 1993, 38.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Carson, Donald A. 'The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—and Other Limits, Too' in Scorgie, Glen G., et al. *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World. Essays in Honor of Ronald F. Youngblood*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003, 66.

from a Translation Studies perspective can be found in Edwin Gentzler's *Contemporary Translation Theories*.<sup>16</sup>

Far from expecting or requiring the domestication that dynamic equivalence usually brings, some cultures in fact expect foreignising or literal translation. Robert Dooley describes the case of the Guarani of Brazil, who rejected an initial idiomatic translation and requested a more literal replacement. Specifically, they requested the usage of foreign words such as "temple" and "camel" rather than 'place where God was worshipped' and 'cow', despite having to learn the meaning of the new terms (there being no temples or camels in their culture). They also requested the removal of in-text explanatory information, preferring the translation to remain closer to the apparent uncertainties of the source text.<sup>17</sup> According to Harriet Hill, the Djimini and Adiokrou groups of the Cote d'Ivoire and the Candoshi of Peru have also requested or required less idiomatic translations.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, developing churches in Indonesian Papua have recently seen the emergence of generations of better educated Christians desiring new translations better suited to more liturgical functions.<sup>19</sup>

Similar expectations can be found elsewhere. The Today's Chinese Version (TEV) is a Chinese dynamic equivalence translation that was completed in 1979 and is best understood as the Chinese equivalent of the Good News Bible. Despite obvious strengths, it is often dismissed as childish or patronising among Chinese believers who are accustomed to religious texts (for example Buddhist or Confucian) being written in a much less colloquial manner. Another situation arises with Bible translation among the Bafia of Cameroon, for whom important teaching is expected to be delivered in abstruse or obscure terms, whether by proverbs or ambiguous statements. Instruction that is identified as easy to understand would not be learned.<sup>20</sup>

There are also instances in Nigeria where churches react negatively to dynamic equivalence Bible translations because the form of the text (reflected in literal translations in Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa) has been seen as a marker of value. Even if their belief in the primacy of form is mistaken, as Barnwell notes, there remains the problem that dynamic equivalence by relegating the importance of form can result in target texts that are rejected by their users.<sup>21</sup>

There are lessons from other religions also. A study of Hebrew translation by Sephardic Jews into Ladino (a Judeo-Spanish calque) reveals that translation

<sup>16</sup> Gentzler, Edwin, *Contemporary Translation Theories*. Second edition, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Dooley, 'Style and Acceptability: The Guarani New Testament' in *Notes on Translation*, 3:1 (1989), 49-57.

<sup>18</sup> Hill, Harriet, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: from Translation to Communication*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2006, 54-62.

<sup>19</sup> De Vries, Lourens, personal communication.

<sup>20</sup> Hill, Harriet, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: from Translation to Communication*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2006, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Barnwell, Katherine G. L. *Introduction to Semantics and Translation*. High Wycombe: Summer Inst of Linguistics, 1974, 19-20.

of passages from the Hebrew Bible were distinctly literal whereas less sacred Mishnaic texts were rendered less literally.<sup>22</sup>

The purpose of foreignisation is not necessarily to retain archaic or original features although that is usually part of the story. It can also include the introduction of pseudo-original textual realia, which are linguistic elements that provide ethnic flavour or a sense of 'otherness' in the target text. In addition to this, foreignisation does not specify how a translation should reflect its foreign origins, only that it should do so. Since cultural situations can differ, so might the means by which foreignisation is achieved. What is considered to be foreignising in one situation may not be so in another. And although foreignisation and literalness are often paired together for convenience, they are not concerned with precisely the same thing. The practice of resistant or foreignising translation mandates the translator – however best suitable – to deviate from the contemporary canon of literature (translated or otherwise) in the target culture so as to retain the alien flavour of the source text.

The difference between domestication and foreignisation is not a question of accuracy, as if one method is more effective at reproducing 'meaning' but, rather, the aim is one of highlighting the differences between source and target cultures. Consequently, there is no suggestion that idiomatic, domesticating or free translation is intrinsically bad. Nor is there an evaluative judgement of which translation methodology is more successful or 'better'. Rather, where a need exists to preserve the cultural 'other' of the source text, the solution is to reject the prevailing preference for domestication, which is often portrayed as the 'only' correct translation strategy.

So dominant is the expectation for domesticating translation that it is sometimes forgotten that English Christian vernacular is heavily influenced by terms and phrases introduced by translation in ways that are distinctly foreignising. When William Tyndale translated the Bible into English in the 16th century, he felt free to invent new English words such as *atonement* even though he might easily have used alternative English expressions. By contrast, modern idiomatic English translations such as the NLT or GNB offer terms such as "make right" or "purify" because it is considered inappropriate to render with uncommonly used English terms, even if they have been readily understood in Christian circles for over 450 years.

The prevailing practice in contemporary Bible translation circles is so different from Tyndale's that not only do translators avoid neologisms, but rather more seriously, avoid many indications of the 'otherness' of the biblical text. Hence, in Acts 1:12, the GNB describes Jerusalem as "a kilometre away" from the Mount of Olives instead of describing it as 'a Sabbath day's journey.' A similar example can be found in Exodus 33:3 which describes Israel as "a rich and fertile land" rather than 'a land flowing with milk and honey.' Or consider Acts 2:15 where the GNB substitutes "nine o'clock" for 'third hour' which reduces

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<sup>22</sup> Schwarzwald, Ora Roderigue, 'Mixed Translation Patterns: The Ladino Translation of Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew Verbs' in *Target*, 5:1 (1993), 71-88.

the Roman background to the events of the chapter. Such output demonstrates the prevailing translation practice of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The point here is not a question of exegetical accuracy or correctness of interpretation but rather a question of ethical or cultural responsibility. That is, the concern is not whether "nine o'clock" is more or less accurate than 'third hour' but rather, what does the target culture require? Translators do not, or should not, render text into a vacuum but like all service providers aim to satisfy the need of the customer. Therefore, domesticating translation is perfectly viable for cultures that desire such translation, but in the contemporary, Western, Bible translation approach, there is sometimes a neglect for cultures that expect otherwise. There ought to be question marks about whether translators can remove the alien markers of a text, and especially so if an audience expects the translation to reflect the features of the source culture. At the very least, the dominant practice of fluent domestication in Bible translation needs to be considered.

#### *ACCIDENTAL AND DELIBERATE FOREIGNISATION*

We might discern at this point between 'accidental' and 'deliberate' foreignisation. The former occurs in the absence of any ideological or ethical concerns for retention of source text features. The latter is an active, deliberately discursive strategy that creates new levels of readability by resisting the dominating domestic values of the target culture and challenging audiences to consider the otherness of the translated text.

Thus, Tyndale's project did not set out on deliberate foreignisation but his methods gave rise to the same result. He felt free to challenge the hegemonic Catholic culture of his time by substituting standard terms such as "church" "priest" and "do penance" for words which (at the time) sounded distinctly alien: 'congregation' 'elder' and 'repent.' So radical were these choices that Tyndale found himself on the end of severe criticism from Sir Thomas More.

As with Tyndale's invention of the word atonement, so elsewhere have Bible translators enriched the language of cultures hitherto unexposed to Christianity. Rather than forcing the language of the Bible into existing words and phrases of a target culture, translators in the past have introduced neologisms or new phrases with useful effects. According to Kichung Kim, the Korean Bible of 1910, produced long before the emergence of dynamic equivalence theory, introduced "new words, new expressions, and even new diction... which has had a noticeable effect on the spoken language of Korean converts."<sup>23</sup>

A similar effect is found among Chinese Christians, where the dominant Bible in Hong Kong and overseas Chinese churches is the Chinese Union Version (CUV) published in 1919. The language is often obscure, decidedly un-Chinese (it was mainly the work of foreign missionaries) but sits well with Chinese believers who instinctively think of Christianity as having been brought from

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<sup>23</sup> Kim, Kichung, *An Introduction to Classical Korean Literature*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996, 213-4



abroad. It is partly an expectation that a faith born outside China should have Scriptures with foreign sounds and unusual expressions, but also partly because their language has been heavily influenced by it, that the CUV continues its dominance over more recent translations such as the Chinese New Version (CNV).

That Chinese believers are naturally aware of the foreign heritage of their faith puts them in a somewhat different position to believers in the West, for whom everyday society and culture is so deeply rooted in a Christian heritage that it is sometimes hard to disassociate the English Bible from its Jewish roots. Indeed, it is this failure to recognise what is evidently foreign that appears to blind Bible translators to the notion that there is great advantage in retaining the alien features of the Bible's source cultures.

There is often a failure to recognise just how foreignising English translations already are. This can lead to the assumption that there is one rule for English speakers and another for minority cultures. Leland Ryken has justly warned of the fallacy that Bible readers have low intellectual and linguistic abilities<sup>24</sup> but the fallacy also extends to the assumption that foreign customs can never be understood in a target culture. A typical example is given by David Katan of a translation into Vietnamese that had local believers amazed that Jesus would wash the disciples' feet rather than their hands.<sup>25</sup> The point seems to be that translators ought to be wary when translating such unusual feet washing customs. Unfortunately, it seems to have been forgotten that foot washing is an equally alien concept in Britain and America, and yet no English Bible is rendered with explanation or alteration. Instead, it is correctly assumed that Western Bible readers will be undeterred by foreign cultural practices and learn to understand such customs when faced with the challenge. The same courtesy that assumes an ability to absorb the foreign should be extended to missionary societies.

Accidental foreignisation is certainly the most common occurrence within Bible translation but deliberate foreignisation has been demonstrated. Everett Fox's translator's preface to his 1995 translation of the Pentateuch is interesting:

The purpose of this work is to draw the reader into the world of the Hebrew Bible through the power of its language. While this sounds simple enough, it is not usually possible in translation. Indeed, the premise of almost all Bible translations, past and present, is that the 'meaning' of the text should be conveyed in as clear and comfortable a manner as possible in one's own language. Yet the truth is that the Bible was not written in English in the twentieth or even the seventeenth century; it is ancient, sometimes obscure, and speaks in a way quite different from ours. Accordingly, I have sought here primarily to echo the style of the original, believing that the Bible is best approached at least at the beginning, on its

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<sup>24</sup> Ryken, Leland, *The Word of God in English*. Wheaton: Crossway books, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Katan, David, *Translating Cultures: an Introduction for Translators, Interpreters, and Mediators*. Second edition, Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2004, 82.

own terms. So I have presented the text in English dress but with a Hebraic voice.<sup>26</sup>

Fox makes no mention of either Venuti or his concept of foreignisation or invisibility and there is no hint of the ethical slant or postcolonial-influenced discussion that is pervasive in these types of discussion. Perhaps some convergent evolution in thought has taken place but in any case, the final output is likely to be something of which Venuti would approve. Although largely unknown in Bible translation theory, deliberate foreignisation is relatively more common in literary translation.

The need for aspects of translational visibility is not a question of linguistic meaning, but of cultural sensitivity to the historical world from which the Bible derives. Whether or not this is also a matter of ethics is debatable and not all are convinced by Berman or Venuti on this point, but at least some recognition that foreignisation ought to be considered is necessary. There are a number of reasons why.

The Scripture already contains much material that has a sense of otherness. Its earliest passages are a record of life from around the time of the patriarchs, while the last books of the New Testament were probably written at the close of the first century. This span of over two millennia *within* the biblical canon provides numerous glimpses of society, culture and practice that were archaic even to original biblical audiences. For example, the writer of the book of Ruth saw it necessary to explain to the contemporary readers that there was once a custom of exchanging sandals as a method of legalising the redemption and transfer of property (Ruth 4:7).

Elsewhere, we see either direct quotation of Aramaic speech or transliteration in the New Testament, some of which had to be explained. For instance, the text of Acts 9:36 includes a parenthetical remark that the Aramaic name *Tabitha* corresponds to the Greek *Dorcas*. If the Bible itself is unashamedly foreign in some parts to its original readers, why must translators be expected to smooth over unusual cultural artefacts simply because prevailing Bible translation theory calls for a fluency ideal?

Moreover, the translation of texts that deliberately introduce foreign words equips target languages with neologisms and fresh expressions. The Hebraic expression 'Amen' is a good example of an introduced word that has crossed multiple language barriers. Once target cultures have learned the meaning of the word Amen, it becomes a natural part of their vocabulary and there is little need to then devise an equivalent idiom from alternative pre-existing words within the target language.

Translators should beware of the assumption that minority cultures prefer domesticating or dynamic translations.<sup>27</sup> This is particularly true when churches

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<sup>26</sup> Fox, Everett, 'Translator's Preface' to *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

expect to study the Bible in depth. It is interesting in this light to examine the methodology of the *Africa Bible Commentary*, a recent major collaborative work of 70 African biblical scholars under the editorship of Tokunboh Adeyemo.<sup>28</sup> The commentary uses the NIV as a basis, a version not normally considered appropriate for missionary contexts. Moreover, the commentary frequently corrects or explains domesticating features of the translation. An example is James 2:2 where the NIV translates the Greek *synagoge* as "meeting" but which prompts the comment that a *synagogue* was the most likely place of meeting, the standard practice until the Jamnia decisions of A.D. 90.

African writers have also spoken of the problems of forcing domestication onto translators. Jean Claude Loba Mkole comments on a translation of the New Testament into Kiswahili that renders the Greek *ho huios tou anthropou* literally. This is against the express advice of the United Bible Societies' handbook on translation which suggests that a literal translation should give way to a title or phrase that clearly denotes a messianic figure. Mkole's preference for a literal translation is based on his disputing the messianic overtones of the Greek term.<sup>29</sup> Whether or not his exegesis is correct, this is a clear case of the need to retain ambiguity, especially in foreign expressions, not least because the New Testament usage of *ho huios tou anthropou* is in itself most likely a foreignising transportation deriving from Hebrew. The retention of ambiguities in source texts means that translators need not force the issue and choose from a range of options. It enables the target audience to see theological or exegetical uncertainties for themselves and avoids glossing over problem texts. In retaining the exegetical uncertainties in the text, students of the Bible can examine problem passages without the translator having made the decision for them already.

In the English-speaking world, technical commentaries on the Bible are typically based on literal translations as seen in such volumes as the *Word Biblical Commentary* and the *Baker Exegetical Commentary* series. Since English-speaking churches require foreignising or literal translations it stands to reason that the same will be true in minority cultures. Although a domesticating translation may be easier to use in missionary contexts, the expectation must be that young churches will mature and their congregations begin to study the Bible in its original context.

A foreignising translation can also minimise suspicions about the importation of Western ideals into missionary societies. J. W. Rogerson makes a valid point about the Good News Bible being used as a secondary translation in Indonesia:

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<sup>27</sup> Again, to emphasise once more: domesticating and dynamic are not exactly the same, and nor are foreignising and literal, but since they typically go together it is convenient to bundle them as one.

<sup>28</sup> Adeyemo, Tokunboh, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2006

<sup>29</sup> Mkole, Jean Claude Loba, 'The Kiswahili Mwana Wa Mtu and the Greek *ho huios tou anthropou*' in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, *The Bible in Africa*. Leiden: Brill, 2000, 557-66.

Since one of the principles of dynamic equivalence translation is that the culture of the target language should have preference over that of the source language, this use of the GNB as a basis for translation introduces the possibility that a translation that reflects the cultural needs of modern Western society is then imposed upon an Asiatic society.<sup>30</sup>

It should also be added that where Western missionaries translate the Bible into minority cultures in a fluent or domesticating fashion, there inevitably arises suspicion in some quarters about colonial power relationships. Tejaswini Niranjana, speaking of literary works, argues that translation is itself a moulding mechanism that aligns cultures into patterns fashioned by the superior power. Niranjana's position is increasingly influential in postcolonial studies, and has been disputed, but even if partly correct then one way to minimise the problem is to leave the door open for as much foreignisation as possible. This is particularly true with the use of a secondary translation as a translational pivot or relay between source and target texts. Note the words of Niranjana:

Translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism ... In creating coherent and transparent texts and subjects, translation participates – across a range of discourses – in the *fixing* of colonised cultures, making them seem static and unchanging rather than historically constructed. Translation functions as a transparent presentation of something that already exists.<sup>31</sup>

Where Niranjana differs from Venuti is that she calls into question the whole notion of representation and consequently takes a decidedly deconstructionist angle. Venuti, however, is much more explicit in adopting foreignising strategies and is hence more useful for Bible translators.

The supermeme of dynamic equivalence has generated some notorious problems. When J. B. Phillips, a 20th century British translator, produced a new version of the New Testament, he rendered Romans 16:16 as "give one another a hearty handshake all around" – a very domesticating expression of British gentlemanly conduct. Eugene Nida approved of this translation by saying that it "quite naturally translates" the Greek (which actually says "greet one another with a holy kiss"). Nida's viewpoint has been rightly criticised by many.<sup>32</sup>

The reason behind Nida's endorsement of the Phillips translation lies in the concept of dynamic equivalence, which is not always a helpful strategy although

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<sup>30</sup> Rogerson, J. W., 'The Old Testament Translator's Translation—A Personal Reflection', in Stanley E. Porter and Richard S. Hess, *Translating the Bible: Problems and Prospects*. 1999, 118-19

<sup>31</sup> Niranjana, Tejaswini, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial Text*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 3.

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Bassnett, Susan, *Translation Studies*. Third edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 33.

certainly useful in many circumstances. It is not so much that dynamic equivalence is a poor translation method but, rather, it is not always a good translation method. Very often, it fails to deliver what target audiences want, which is why a skopos theory approach to translation is more helpful.

*SKOPOS THEORY: A FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH FOR  
PURPOSE DRIVEN TRANSLATION*

Skopos theory, though highly valued in Translation Studies, is largely unknown among Bible translators. It resolves the age-old and ongoing debates about free versus literal translation as well as the contemporary disagreements over gender neutrality.<sup>33</sup> Its core tenets have long been adopted within the wider field of Translation Studies but with notable exceptions (e.g. Lourens de Vries) skopos theory is either little-known or undervalued within Bible translation circles.

The concept of skopos theory originated in the late 1970s with important work by German theorists Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiss.<sup>34</sup> Its most important contribution is the recognition that the function or purpose of the translated text should determine the form and method of the translation. To put it another way, a translated text is primarily determined by the function(s) for which it was intended to serve in the target culture. The source text is therefore 'dethroned' and although a degree of equivalence is always necessary between source and target text, the primary focus of attention has shifted from the source to the target culture. This is a complete reversal of traditional methods of translation (but which remain very much in vogue in Bible translation theory) that focus primarily on the source text.

This target approach is known as functionalist<sup>35</sup> and understands that a variety of translated texts may be viable in a given culture. There is no single 'correct' way of translating. The current debates over dynamic against formal in Bible translation appear outdated when one surveys the literature in Translation Studies. There, discussion over the relative merits of free or literal translation more or less ended with the emergence of the cultural turn nearly three decades ago. The application of such functionalist approaches to Bible translation would

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<sup>33</sup> In a 2007 paper at the Evangelical Theological Society, Karen Jobes remarked that Bible translation theory had "stalled" on the question of formal or dynamic equivalence. Such stalling may be true in Bible translation circles, but in Translation Studies, the debate ended with the emergence of functionalist theories nearly 30 years ago.

<sup>34</sup> Best articulated in English in Hans J. Vermeer, *A Skopos Theory of Translation: (Some Arguments for and against)*. Heidelberg: TEXTconTEXT, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Confusingly, Bible translators have taken to using the term 'functionalist' in an entirely different way to Translation Studies theorists. In Bible translation, functionalist means translating in a strictly free or dynamic fashion, and aiming at *source* text equivalence, hence 'functional equivalence'. In contrast Translation Studies uses functionalist to describe *target* text approaches to translation that may be free, literal or anywhere in between. Because of this confusion, Translation Studies theorists usually ignore the term 'functional equivalence' and prefer the older term 'dynamic equivalence'.

be thus: if the function expects a dynamic equivalence or gender neutral translation philosophy, then such translation methods are appropriate. But if the function expects a foreignising or literal translation that locates the text in the world of first century Judaism then again, the translator is obliged to render accordingly. Both the dynamic and foreignising translation are 'correct' and they should be evaluated not against each other but by their acceptability to the target culture function.

The reason why Bible translation is so well suited to skopos theory is that multiple functions for Bibles exist. This is true in any church society whether a newly established or mature institution. Bibles may be used for liturgical reading, expository preaching, evangelism, personal devotionals, academic or exegetical study. Moreover, the audience may be children, teenagers, adults, foreigners without local language competence, Bible scholars, or even translators. In addition, certain groups may prefer gender inclusive language, or transliterated Hebrew names, or particular approaches to divine names. Furthermore, the Bible contains a varied mix of poetry, narrative, parable, apocalyptic and didactic discourses, all of which may require differing skopoi. Differing functions demand a differing type of translation and by focusing on the target audience requirements, skopos theory enables the translator to provide accordingly.

Skopos theory can be summed up thus: the end justifies the means. All texts, whether translations or primary / secondary texts, should be understood in terms of the target culture purpose and not necessarily in terms of source text analysis. It is not through an analysis of the source text that the function is ascertained but through a definition of the purpose of the translation in the target culture. The target text's form and content is therefore shaped primarily by its intended purpose and not by the nature of the source text. Of course, this must necessarily take place with the restraining mechanisms of translational fidelity or loyalty.

The concept of 'loyalty' was added by Nord as part of her version of skopos theory and which gives rise to her 'functionality plus loyalty' principle translation. By insisting on loyalty, Nord is adding an ethical concept that commits the translator bilaterally to the source and target partners in a communication event. The notion should not be confused with fidelity or faithfulness, which are linguistic concepts concerned with establishing some kind of equivalence between texts. Instead, loyalty is an ethical, social concept built on interpersonal moral constraints that emphasises trust between the translator and the source and target cultures. Nord writes, "For example, if the target culture expects a translation to be a literal reproduction of the original, translators cannot simply translate in a non-literal way without telling the target audience."<sup>36</sup>

Despite this article's promotion of foreignising strategies, it should not be inferred that Bible translations should always be literal or foreignising, but that where a text function expects or demands it, translators are professionally (and perhaps ethically if we take Venuti's full framework) obliged to satisfy the

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<sup>36</sup> Nord, Christiane, *Translating As a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 1997.

demand. But the production of translations in minority cultures or missionary societies is so bound up with modern Bible translation theory's dominant dynamic equivalence approach, that special emphasis is required for a skopos-based outlook that enables us to consider largely-unknown, but much-needed, translation methods such as foreignisation.

It would be good to emphasise again some key points. I am not suggesting that foreignising translation is always correct, only that it is sometimes necessary. Nor am I suggesting that dynamic equivalence is always problematic, only that it is not always the right approach. And although there is much value in foreignising translation, I am not suggesting that it is a perfect strategy (space precludes opportunity for criticism) but it is generally valuable and presently largely unknown in Bible translation. Furthermore I do not wish to give the impression that this is a question of exegetical preference or 'better' linguistic meaning. Nor is this an attempt to continue the ongoing debate over free versus literal or dynamic versus formal methods of translation. The question, rather, is one of skopos and cultural interchange. It is a matter of satisfying the needs of target audiences that have a desire to be transported into the Jewish / Babylonian / Persian / Greek / Roman and other cultures' worlds in which the Bible's writers and original recipients were located.

### *CONCLUSION*

This article provides a new contribution to ongoing discussions among Evangelicals concerning appropriate methods of Bible translation. The concept of foreignisation in translation is an influential concept that has yet to find a home in Bible translation theory, despite there being a wealth of source culture aspects that may need to be preserved. A number of reasons why foreignising translation may be required has been explored ranging from ethical to exegetical reasons. These demonstrate the fallacy of the dominant viewpoint among Bible translators that domesticating or dynamic translation is the one true way of translation.

The cultural turn that emerged in the 1980s in Translation Studies revolutionised the field particularly in emphasising functionalist, target orientation in translation. By contrast, Bible translation theory is apparently stuck in a linguistic-based approach to translation that prevailed in the 1960s and 70s and would benefit from adopting the more contemporary approaches found in the wider field of Translation Studies. Of particular importance would be a new drive towards purpose driven translation borrowing heavily from functionalist theories such as skopos theory. Only then would Bible translators escape the current dominant viewpoint that a 'one size fits all' method of dynamic translation is the right way to translate.

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