

THE END OF AN ERA?

DOES *SKOPOS* THEORY SPELL THE END OF THE “FREE VS. LITERAL” PARADIGM?

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Introduction

While most discussion of Bible translations take place around the traditional “free vs. literal” debate, modern, non-Biblical translation theory has become suspicious of such easy dichotomies (e.g. Pym 1997: 39). Many translation scholars now tend to examine translations based on the purpose for which they were written.¹ This article will examine *skopos* theory, one of the most well-known purpose-based translation theories, in more depth and will discuss the potential objections to using it to examine and analyse Bible translations. This theory has been chosen as it is the only purpose-based translation theory so far to have been applied to Bible translation. I will argue for this theory to become the prevailing theory for examining entire Bible translations while the use of the more traditional terminology would then be restricted to the description of small-scale translation decisions, if used at all.

Skopos theory explained

In *skopos* theory, translation is seen as “an intentional, interpersonal, partly verbal intercultural interaction based on a source text” (Nord [1997] 2007: 18). To fully examine this theory, we must first examine the core notion of translation as an ‘intentional’ activity.

Nord admits that viewing translation as “intentional” or “purposeful” seems to be self-evident (ibid p. 1). After all, the very act of doing anything implies intent or purpose (Sire 1988: 103, 227 [note 21]). However, to view translation specifically as an “intentional” activity means that the translation itself must be judged according to how well it fulfilled its purpose (Schäffner 1997: 2). This is the basis that forms the *skopos* rule, which is as follows:

[To] translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely the way they want it to function. (Nord [1997] 2007: 29, translating Vermeer 1989: 20)

How this rule operates can be demonstrated from professional practice. A translator working on a CV that is to be submitted to an employer in a target culture² will deliberately translate in such a way that the CV will function in that culture. This may involve seeking target culture equivalents for qualifications mentioned, converting job titles into recognisable target language titles or even changing the grammatical class of words. In my own work, one of the most frequent changes made to such documents is to change nouns into verbs given the preference in English-language CVs for action verbs (as shown in Yate [1993] 2003: 59-61).

Judging the success of a translation on how well it fulfilled the “intention” for which it was written means that its relation to the source text will necessarily become a secondary concern. The translation strategy chosen and therefore the relation between the two texts will be determined by the intention of the translation (Nord [1997] 2007: 32). In CVs, this would lead the translator to weigh up strategies for handling the use of target culture equivalents of qualifications – e.g. adding them next to the source culture term, using footnotes or replacing the source term completely. In Bible translation this might mean weighing up strategies for handling source language terms for which there is no real target culture equivalent (see Fee and Stuart [1993] 2002: 37, 38 for examples).

This view tends to reduce the tendency for any particular translation strategy to be seen as an “ideal.” While there may be some occasions and intentions that call for the strategy Fee and Strauss (2007: 28) call “formal equivalence,” others will call for “functional equivalence.” Rather than choosing one of these two, or indeed any other option, for purely theological or linguistic reasons, the translator will make his or her choice based on which is more likely to serve the purpose of the text (Nord 2002: 33; 2003: 34). This view forms an alternative to the more traditional theories, which have caused so much debate in the past. In fact, many *skopos* theorists see it is a real opportunity to solve the debates over

“free vs. faithful translation, dynamic vs. formal equivalence, good interpreters vs. slavish translators, and so on” (Nord [1997] 2007: 29).

This challenges the traditional supremacy of the source text as the sole basis on which translations must be assessed. While, Hans Vermeer, one of the originators of *skopos* theory, stated that there must be a relationship between the source and target text (Nord [1997] 2007: 32); he also claimed to have “dethroned” the source text as an unchangeable and unchanging basis of comparison (ibid p. 37). Some theorists feel that this could easily lead to any and all translation purposes being seen as acceptable, even if they are incompatible with the apparent purpose of the source text (ibid p. 124; Pym 1997: 91). Following this principle, there would be nothing inherently wrong with changing universities mentioned on a CV to UK equivalents (“Oxford” for “Sorbonne,” for example) or changing all references to places in the Bible to equivalents in modern-day USA, as one Bible translator is reported to have done (Fee and Strauss 2007: 33).

In both cases, such changes, while possibly being defensible as “equivalents” on a purely cultural level, are very likely to mislead the reader. If, for instance, the writer of a CV attended “Sorbonne” but the translator uses “Oxford,” the client could be accused of lying if the prospective employer decides to verify their claim. Similarly, no matter how familiar US cities are to US Bible readers, the fact is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not Boston. *Skopos* theory therefore lacked logical and ethical limits to what could be seen as acceptable translation practice (Pym 1997: 91).

To solve this weakness, Christiane Nord added the variable of “loyalty” to *skopos* theory. “Loyalty” here is taken to mean the translator’s commitment both to the clients and text producers they work with and to the culture in which they work (Nord [1997] 2007: 125). This addition introduces an “interpersonal” aspect to *skopos* theory as translators are seen as having responsibilities towards all their communicative partners. This also answers Pym’s criticism (Pym 1997: 92-3) that *skopos* theory reduces the role of the translator to that of a service provider who exists to fulfil others’ purposes, with no ethical space of their own. With the addition of the notion of “loyalty” the translator is now ethically and professionally responsible to either observe the expectations their partners have of their work or to tell them why these expectations have not been met. Nord explains how this works in the following terms.

Normally, since authors are not experts in translation, they are likely to insist on a faithful rendering of the source text’s surface structures. Only if they trust the translator’s loyalty will they consent to any changes of adaptations needed to make the translation work in the target culture. And this confidence would again strengthen the translator’s prestige as a responsible and trustworthy partner. (Nord [1997] 2007: 125)

This trust in the translator’s “loyalty” to their communicative partners in translation is therefore seen as empowering the translator to ensure that the text achieves its given purpose. It also imposes on the translator a duty to remain loyal to the original author of the source text by ensuring that the intentions of the target text are in line with those of the original author (Nord [1997] 2007: 125). In the case of Bible translation, Nord feels that the translator’s loyalty is to the authors of the Bible and to those who will read the Word, rather than to previous translations or “faithfulness” (whatever that may be) to nouns, verbs, and adjectives.’ (Nord 2008: personal communication).

This idea of “loyalty” also introduces the “intercultural” (Nord [1997] 2007: 18) dynamic to *skopos* theory. This notion is likely to become most necessary when there is a disagreement between the source and target culture as to what a good translation is. In this case, the translator is expected to act as a mediator between the two cultures (ibid p. 125). This may take the form of the translator explaining to a publisher that a translation is likely to be politically unpopular if done correctly or reducing the forcefulness of an expression in order to ensure that the source text producer is not discredited (ibid p. 127). In both cases, the translator must take into account the difference in how various cultures perceive translation and the likely reaction of the target audience.

The “intercultural” aspect encourages translation problems to be examined in the light of cultural issues. A good example of this is the problem of what to do with the word “denarius” in Jesus’ parable of the workmen in the field (Matthew 20: 1-16). It may be right to insist that this be seen as “the average wage of a day laborer” (Fee and Strauss 2007: 94) however, there still remains a two-fold translation problem. Firstly, people who work in steady employment today tend to be paid weekly or monthly and not daily, so the phrase “normal daily wage” as used in the NLT translation of verse 2 is possibly unclear. Secondly, if translators try to avoid this by picking a particular amount of money,

they run the risk of either inflation or irrelevant comparisons making a mockery of their work. There is simply no real equivalent available. The choice here is therefore not between a good solution and a bad one but between several solutions that each have their own strengths and weaknesses.

Once again, the translator will choose their solution according to the purpose of their translation, including its intended audience (Taylor 1997: 76-77). A translation prepared for new believers in the UK might call for the use of an explanatory phrase or even a very rough monetary equivalent; a translator working in a culture where bartering is more common might prefer the option of exchanging “denarius” for a more common method of payment. Conversely, a translation prepared in a culture where daily pay is very common could very easily contain the phrase “the normal daily rate” with no problem. The key here is that it is not so much the word itself that is the problem but its use in the particular culture in question. In this context Harries’ (2006: 59) appeal for a study of language use gains even more impetus as translators are very like to inadvertently choose unsuitable solutions if they do not have such information.

This “intercultural” element in turn leads into the final consideration; that of translation being a “partly verbal” interaction. In this case, it is the word “partly” that carries the greatest weight. In *skopos* theory, translation is not simply about the exchange of word A in language X for word B in language Y. Instead, this theory, much like the theories of Hatim and Mason ([1997] 2003), sees translation as essentially about communication (Nord [1997] 2007: 10, 11, 16, 17; 2003: 34). This agrees with Strauss’ assertion that translation is primarily about communicating meaning rather than reproducing form (Strauss 2004: xx). The centre of any analysis should therefore be how the meaning of the text has been communicated.³

Applying *skopos* theory to Bible translations

No scholar could pretend that examining the purpose of Bible translations is entirely new. Fee and Strauss (2007: 119-120) have already noted the first decision to be made by translators is to determine the intended audience for their translation. However, given the relatively late placement of this comment, the reader must assume that, in their view, considerations of purpose and audience design must take second place to discussions over translation approach.

This seems contradictory. If they say “the first, and most critical, decision made by translators...has to do with the audience intended for their translation” (Fee and Strauss 2007: 119) then the meagre attention given to the analysis of this issue at the end of the book disproportionately influences the weight of their argument. If the translator must first decide on the intended audience, then those discussing Bible translations should also start with the question of the audience design and translation purpose. To begin at the end, so to speak, suggests that somehow translation approaches such as “formal equivalence” or “functional equivalence” (ibid p. 25-34) can be discussed as translation strategies independently of issues of translation purpose, audience design or even cultural expectations. It really cannot be stressed enough that such a view is dubious at best (see Taylor 1997: 76-77 for examples of this in action).

Given the emphasis in *skopos* theory on the intention or purpose of the translation, applying it to Bible translation requires the reader or scholar to be able to determine the purpose for which the translation was written. As I wrote elsewhere, in most cases the prefaces of Bible translations do normally contain the requisite information for this task. This information should therefore form the basis of the analysis of any translation.

To take an example that I have already used⁴, the preface New King James Version clearly illustrates the translators’ wish to stay as closely as possible to the rhythm and phrasing of the original Authorised Version (NKJV 1982: xxxv). The success or otherwise of this translation should therefore be primarily measured against its similarity to this text. Conversely, it would be foolish to use the same standard to describe the success or failure of The Message in fulfilling its *skopos*. Here the translator has clearly stated that his purpose was to translate in a way that would sound as if the Word was originally written or preached to his church (Peterson 2003: lii; Strauss 2004: xvi). He also stated clearly that his translation was not aimed at scholars but at helping people who may have become disenchanted with the Word to read it in a new light (Peterson 2003: li).

In this case, *skopos* theory serves to encourage readers to measure translations against the known and explicit standard set by their translators⁵. This avoids the pitfalls of the more traditional accounts of translations where scholars could attempt to establish a translation rule without clearly defining why this should be the case. In the case of Fee and Strauss (2007: 36), for example, this manifests itself in recommendations that in all translations, the epistles should “read like first-century letters” (ibid p. 37). In the case of Wenham’s review of Ryken (Wenham 2003: 77, 78) this is shown in the implicit assertion that the Bible must read like a work of great literature and that linguistic tricks can and should be reproduced in all translations.

Both cases assume that the scholar’s subjective preference is or should be a universal truth. There is little reason to expect non-academic readers of the Bible to notice or be interested in the forms and conventions of a first-century letter. Neither is it justifiable to insist that the Bible should read like one of the literary classics when there is little in the Word itself to justify such a view. While these scholars may have found issues that are of great importance to some audiences, it is going too far to set them up as universal principles of translation. Instead, *skopos* theory would require that the importance of these views would depend on the purpose of the translation, including its intended audience. The principles and resulting strategies pertinent to translations aimed at Bible scholars or academics in training will not necessarily be the same as those required in translations aimed at someone whose knowledge of the source language and culture is more limited and vice versa. Similarly, many of the requirements of a translation aimed at lovers of classic English prose will be significantly different to those of a translation aimed at lovers of ancient history.

The “interpersonal” elements of *skopos* theory, including Nord’s addition of “loyalty,” encourage readers to trust Bible translators, no matter which of the traditional views they might favour. In this view, the translator’s responsibility towards God, the writers of the Bible and their target audience is given centre stage. Unlike the traditional paradigms, which have proven to be insufficient to prevent translations from clearly distorting the meaning of Scripture (Fee and Stuart [1993] 2002: 43), loyalty shuts the door to sectarian and unorthodox interpretations. In the framework of loyalty, attempts to create a translation that denies or reduces the deity of Christ, for instance, are absolutely excluded as justifiable translation purposes.

“Loyalty,” of course, does not entirely erase the differences that will arise when translators of different theological perspectives translate the Word – what one translator will see as remaining “loyal” to the authors of the Word, another might see as a distortion. In this case, neither the view that the “client,” in this case the publisher, is always right nor the idea that “professionalism” is enough of a basis on which to make a decision (Pym 1997: 79-82) can provide an adequate basis for judging between different views. However, it must be admitted that there is simply no research into the operations of loyalty in any translation. It is seen as a philosophical and ethical concept rather than one that can be empirically measured (Nord [1997] 2007: 125). Until further research is done into its operation, researchers can only suggest possible routes in the pursuit of a solution to this dilemma. One approach worth pursuing would be to recommend that Bible translators find colleagues of differing theological viewpoints to check their work. Another would be for theologians, translation scholars and Bible translators to work together on the preparation of professional guidelines akin to those that professional associations require their members to sign.⁶

The “intercultural” element of *skopos* theory emphasizes that the act of translating the Bible involves building a bridge between the world of the Biblical writers and the world of today. One solution is to try to make the “otherness” of the Biblical worlds “accessible” to modern readers (Nord 2005). Another option among many is to keep “historical distance” in some places and not in others (see Fee and Stuart [1993] 2002: 35-42). Where previous scholars have tried to set up one approach as an ideal for all translations, *skopos* theory would yet again insist that the ideal approach is dependent on the purpose of the translation and is limited by the translator’s loyalty.

***Skopos* theory and traditional paradigms**

The central argument of this article has been that *skopos* theory should become the new standard theory for the discussion of Bible translations. However, any discussion on this point must acknowledge that it could be argued that this theory and those underlying the “free vs. literal” debate seek to define and discuss entirely different problems. With its emphasis on the purpose of the translation, *skopos* theory compares the translation to the purpose for which it was written. The traditional models, on the other

hand, have only ever sought to compare the target text with the source text. Most discussions over Bible translations in general and translation choice in particular centre on how translators handle short portions of text (e.g. Fee and Stuart 2002: 36-42, Strauss 2004 and Fee and Strauss 2007: 45-110). Traditionalists may say that this shows that the traditional approaches are at their best in discussions concerning the linguistic aspects of translation. Hence, to expect analysis performed using this mode to include situational variables is to stretch the framework over an area it was never meant to cover.

Such an argument does have some support. When Fee and Strauss (2007: 25-34) talk of “formal equivalence” and “functional equivalence,” they imagine equivalence in specifically linguistic terms. It is then perfectly logical that they should cite evidence from grammar (ibid p. 28) or comparative linguistics (ibid p. 25) to justify their views. Such a model, however, tends to pull discussions of translation further and further out of the reach of all but the most dedicated scholars. In order to choose a Bible translation, a believer would need a strong grounding in linguistics, theology and preferably one or more of the biblical languages. This leaves us with the sad fact that the only people qualified to choose a Bible translation would be those who translated the version in the first place and those who are likely to translate the next version.

The other problem with this model is that, when it comes to the kinds of fine-grain analysis that is required by such a purely linguistic approach to translation, the model turns out to be nothing but a blunt instrument. In the example of the “denarius” stated above, the only translation solution that could be labelled “formal equivalence” is the transliteration of the name itself with no additions. All other possibilities will therefore be filed under “functional equivalence.” Given that language-specific rules of grammar may often prevent anything approaching formal equivalence (Bühler 1990: 31), the traditional models prove insufficient for even purely linguistic analysis.⁷

When it comes to helping people choose a translation, *skopos* theory seems to offer us a far more stable foundation than the traditional models. Decisions concerning which translation should be used for which purpose must be based on a theory that is centred on translation purpose. After all, if both translators and readers begin with purpose in mind, it is perfectly logical that those analysing or recommending translations should too. The principle that people should look for the translation with the purpose which most closely matches their purpose in using it is also far simpler and potentially less controversial than any attempt to argue the case for a universally ideal approach, especially since the existence of such an approach is doubtful anyway (Ellingworth 2004: 352)

Objections to *skopos* theory

It would be naïve to suppose that *skopos* theory, or any new view for that matter, is so faultless and perfectly formed that opposition to it is impossible or foolish. This section therefore discusses some of the principle objections to *skopos* theory.

Objection no. 1: *Skopos* theory tells us nothing new

Given that the roots of *skopos* theory are found in previous functionalist theories (Nord [1997] 2007: 9) and theories of action (ibid pp. 11-13), critics have questioned how original it actually is (ibid pp. 114-116). Similarly, if Bible scholars are already aware of the need for Bible readers to be aware of the purpose and audience for which the translation was designed, we could easily question the need for an entirely new theory based on the same concept.

It is true that translation purpose and cultural issues have already been discussed in connection with Bible translation; however, such discussions (e.g. Harries 2006 and Nord 2005) have actually concluded that the traditional approaches do not give sufficient consideration to either of these areas. *Skopos* theory could therefore be seen as an attempt to answer the call for a more integrated approach to Bible translation that foregrounds cultural and purpose-based variables.

The novelty of *skopos* theory is therefore not located so much in the information it contains but in how this information is organised. The centre of analysis moves from being semantic equivalence or equivalence in terms of linguistic forms to the purpose of the translation including its intended audience. In this case, the semantic comparison of the target and source texts turns into the functional analysis of the quality of the translation in terms of its suitability for its purpose. Discussions over translation strategies are removed from their imagined vacuum and morph into debates over which

strategies are most suitable for which purposes. Lastly, translations are no longer classified according to subjective criteria such as “historical distance” (Fee and Stuart [1994] 2002: 36) but are organised according to their purpose and intended audience.

Thus, if the initial objection is set aside, the possibility for new avenues of research arises as translation theorists and practitioners seek to empirically examine how well a Bible translation has fulfilled its purpose in its target situation. Strategies and methods borrowed from market research may be of use, allowing new translations to be field tested in focus groups, churches and even non-Christian audiences. New models of translation could be built integrating *skopos* theory and discussions of translation techniques, allowing theorists to examine the effects of different purposes on different translations.

Skopos theory also suggests new approaches in Bible translation teaching. Firstly, it suggests the need for further cross-disciplinary work on the use of non-Biblical translation theories in Bible translation practice. It also suggests that teachers of Bible translation might benefit from the functionalist teaching approaches outlined by Nord ([1997] 2007: 39-79). These include a deep analysis of the function(s) of the source text and thoughts on how changes in function may affect translation strategies. Such approaches may bring welcome balance to some of the current discussions of Bible translation (e.g. Wenham 2003, Fee and Strauss 2007) where target culture and translation purpose are given scant attention.

Objection no. 2: *Skopos* reduces the status of the source text too far

If it is accepted that *skopos* theory offers a useful new perspective, discussion must turn to the most pressing danger of its use in Bible translation. Since shortly after the theory was formalised, with the appearance of Reiss and Vermeer’s *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie* in 1984, one of the most trenchant criticisms of *skopos* theory has been that it gives too little respect to the source text (Nord [1997] 2007: 119). Where equivalence to the source text, in one form or another, was once held up as being the sole purpose of translation⁸, we now have a situation where we have a multiplicity of purposes with no criteria to allow us to judge one against another (Pym 1997: 91).

Even if we accept for the moment that Nord’s concept of “loyalty” is entirely sufficient to resolve this dilemma, we still find ourselves faced with a situation where the Word of God as written in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic is reduced to being an “offer of information” (Vermeer 1982 cited in Nord [1997] 2007: 12). This “offer of information” could then be translated in any way that the translator sees fit in order to fulfil the purpose that has been set for the translation. Not only does this stretch the traditional conceptual limits of translation to breaking point (Pym 1995: 168) but it fails to take into account the inspired nature of the Word of God.

Any solution to this problem must take into account that more recent accounts of *skopos* theory have deliberately underlined the importance of source text analysis in translation. Nord ([1997] 2007: 62) sees three main reasons for detailed source text analysis.

Analysis of the source text guides the translation process in that it provides the basis for decision about (a) the feasibility of the translation assignment, (b) which source-text units are relevant to functional translation, and (c) which translation strategy will lead to a target text meeting the requirements of the translation brief.

To this we might add the necessity of detailed exegesis to help translators determine the textual and theological function of the source text at any given time. Such exegesis gives translators as much information as possible on the source text to allow them to determine how much of this information must or even can be communicated to allow the translation to function for its target audience. An example of this is the decision taken by Nord and her husband to use the German verb “setze sich” (sat down) in their translation of Luke 6:20, because their historical research that showed that teachers in New Testament times would often be seated with their disciples stood around them (Nord 2003: 35).

Thus, while equivalence to the linguistic form of the source text may not be seen as important in *skopos* theory, it would be a mistake to see this as a danger to accurate Bible translation. On the contrary, if we add the notion of “loyalty” to the need for exegesis and source text analysis, we have a powerful heuristic for determining the acceptability of any given translation purpose. No purpose is acceptable if it means being disloyal to the original intended purpose of the Word of God or of the particular section

of it under discussion (following Nord [1997] 2007: 125). Creating a translation for use with new believers could be justified in that it would help with the fulfilment of Christ's command in Matthew 28: 28-20. Similarly, translating an entire version specifically aimed at helping personal or theological study could be justified by 2 Timothy 3: 16-17. On the other hand, translating the Scriptures in such a way as to attempt to induce racist views of the Jews or to defend sectarian theological opinions would be disallowed. In both cases, there is no backing for this purpose neither in Scripture itself nor in any responsible exegesis.

Interestingly enough, this approach would also question the value of translations confessing "loyalty" to previous translations in the same language. Given the lack of any possible justification, outside of subjective opinions over what constitutes a "faithful" or "beautiful" translation, such translation purposes would be subject to severe questioning under *skopos* theory. It would seem that, while *skopos* theory would open the door to new translation purposes, it is likely to close the door to others. For this reason, the validity of any given translation purpose must remain a matter of theological debate. In this case, the theory is not enough in itself to solve the issue but once again points to how discussions from other fields can be integrated into the debate.

Objection 3: Opting for one Bible translation purpose is too simplifying

No matter how hard translation theorists such as Hatim and Mason ([1997] 2005: vii, 1, 111-126) and Nord (2003) might try to argue that translation theory and its associated disciplines work equally well in any domain, there will always be dissenting voices arguing that the Bible is different. One of the areas in which it would seem to most differ from many of the texts analysed in translation theory is that it is not a single text, produced at a given moment in time and in a given culture but a collection of 66 texts written and collected over thousands of years. A quick glance in any Bible commentary will assure the reader that each book was written with a different purpose and audience in mind. Dissenters could therefore argue, with some justification, that the attempt to translate the Bible for a single purpose or audience is far too simplifying.

It is entirely plausible to think in such terms. To translate Nahum's prophecies against Nineveh as predictions of the downfall of any modern city would betray the translator's loyalty to both the prophet and the audience of the translation. On the other hand, to take the practicality of the book of James and translate it in such a way that the reader spends all his or her time studying the grammar of his instructions would be equally disloyal. It once again becomes necessary for translators to carry out a detailed exegesis of the text at hand in order to try to discover the intentions of the writer at each stage.

However, it would be a mistake to interpret this duty as nullifying the idea of an overall translation purpose. The very fact that almost all Bible translations include the purpose for their work in the preface should be enough to prove this point. Similarly, we have seen that even theorists coming from the point of view of traditional theories realise the importance of translation purpose. Therefore, we must conclude that while translators have a duty to be aware of and integrate the intentions of the original authors into their work, in practice the way that this is done is determined by the purpose of the translation as a whole.

Objection 4: *Skopos* theory is skewed towards "functionally equivalent" translation

In theory, there should be no question of *skopos* theory favouring one translation strategy over another as the central tenet of *skopos* theory is that translators will choose their translation strategies and techniques according to the purpose of the translation (Nord 2002: 33). Nord's schema of possible text-wide translation strategies (Nord [1997] 2007: 48, 51) comes close to confirming this assumption. She lists four strategies that prioritise the documentation of features of the source culture and three that prioritise the function of the text as an "instrument for target-culture communicative interaction" (ibid p. 51).

However, it would be equally easy to assume that the very orientation of *skopos* theory towards purposes as they are determined in the target culture (e.g. Nord [1997] 2007: 115) will necessarily tend towards the production of functionally equivalent translations. In many of the examples of purposes suggested earlier in this article, some form of deviation from the formal elements and order of the source text will be necessary in order to make the translation function for the target readership. In the example of the translation of CVs, it was suggested that additions would be necessary in order for the

CV to help get someone a new job. In the example of the translation of the word “denarius,” it was suggested that, in most cases, some kind of explanatory phrase or modern monetary equivalent would be more useful than retaining the original term without any changes.

In light of such examples, we must conclude that most translation purposes will involve some kind of move towards what traditional translation theory might call “functional equivalence” (e.g. Fee and Strauss 2007: 28). The opposite approach, while perfectly justifiable, tends to only be justified in the light of a limited number of translation purposes. On the other hand, the fact that the strategies called for by so many purposes – from translating for new believers or those whose first language is not that of the translation to the attempt to produce an equivalent effect on the target audience – would all be classified under a single heading suggests a further weakness in the traditional labelling of translations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to provide a more detailed account of *skopos* theory, paying particular attention to the possible objections to its use in Bible translation choice and analysis. *Skopos* theory has been seen to cover far more ground than is commonly covered by the more traditional accounts of Bible translation. Its emphasis on the intentional nature of translation offers a new way of examining and choosing finished translations as well as opening new research avenues in translation reception and translator training. Its notions of the intercultural and interpersonal aspects of translation offer a way of integrating concerns raised by missionary translators into standard theory while still offering boundaries for translation practice.

However, the emphasis on translation purpose has also been the source of many of the objections to its use. These may be based on concerns over the resulting status of the source text, a perceived danger of oversimplification or a possible bias towards a particular translation strategy. In all cases, while there is much remaining to be discussed, the beginnings of solutions to these issues can be found by integrating *skopos* theory into a multidisciplinary approach involving theology, history and even ethics.

Despite these objections, *skopos* theory holds a great advantage over traditional approaches when it comes to translation analysis and choice. In both cases, it asserts that analysis should begin at the same point as the translator or translation user will begin: the purpose of the translation. In doing so, it not only allows those who have not been able to spend years in further education to choose a translation following common-sense variables but also offers a stable and reliable framework for the discussion of individual translation techniques. For this reason and given the advantages sketched above, it is the opinion of the author that *skopos* theory should become the primary theoretical foundation for the discussion of Bible translations, displacing the more traditional theories.

Notes

- ¹ An example of this method being used to help readers choose a Bible translation can be found in my current article in *The Pneuma Review*.
- ² In this article I will use the naming conventions of modern, non-Biblical, translation theory throughout. The adjective “source” as in “source language,” “source text,” and “source culture” will be therefore used to refer to the entities belonging to or originating in the language or culture in which the text to be translated was written. The adjective “target,” on the other hand, will refer to equivalent entities as they appear in the language or culture into which the text is to be translated. Although the Bible is made up of “source texts” written in three “source languages,” I will refer to these entities in the singular throughout, given that translation theory is, or aims to be, language-neutral as far as possible.
- ³ Of course, the possibility of separating meaning and form has been debated in many places for thousands of years. Similarly, some Bible translation scholars (e.g. NKJV 1982: xxxiv) have seen the form itself as an essential part of the meaning. However, as is explained in note 4 of my current article in *The Pneuma Review*, such a view quickly leads to Bible translation being devalued since any translation will necessarily lead to a change in form.
- ⁴ See the analysis of this version in my forthcoming article in Summer 2009 issue of *The Pneuma Review*.
- ⁵ It is heartening that one of the more fortunate outcomes of the controversy over the TNIV has been Packer’s article in *Christianity Today* (1997: 30-31) that concluded that all mainstream Bible translations do “surprisingly well in terms of their own ground rules” (ibid p. 31). It is the sincere hope of this scholar that others will follow this common-sense and purpose-based approach to Bible translation analysis and criticism.
- ⁶ Examples of these can be found on the AIIC website (<http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article122.htm>), on the ITI website ([http://www.iti.org.uk/pdfs/newPDF/20FHConductIn_\(04-08\).pdf](http://www.iti.org.uk/pdfs/newPDF/20FHConductIn_(04-08).pdf)) and on the websites of similar organisations.
- ⁷ There are, of course, alternative ways of examining translation techniques and their effects (e.g. Molina and Albir 2002) that may be of interest to Bible translation scholars. Rather than trying to divide the myriad of translation techniques into two or three approaches the authors offer a taxonomy of 18 possible translation techniques based on the differences between the source and target text in each case (ibid p. 509-511). Such models could further help to defuse some of the tension in discussions of Bible translations by allowing linguistic analysis to be carried out according to objective factors. This would offer the radical possibility of moving discussions of Bible translation away from the traditional models entirely. However, since the usefulness of such models in Bible translation remains to be tested, the traditional models are likely to persist for some time yet.
- ⁸ Examples of this include Worrell’s view, as cited in Kuykendall (2007: 263) and even the less restrictive views suggested in Fee and Stuart ([1994] 2002: 37) and Fee and Strauss (2007: 19, 25-30).

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