

Measuring the Adequacy of the Host Text Using *Skopostheorie* in Bible Translation: The Ethics of Operational Transparency¹

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Abstract

Skopostheorie's focus on function provides a framework for evaluating translation which is potentially realistic, measurable, and operationally transparent. To realize that potential the translation brief can be critiqued for its principles and methodology, but also the host translation can be measured for its adequacy by comparing the translation decisions in the host text with the instructions in the translation brief. I explore ways to measure translation adequacy within a *Skopostheorie* framework, using Nord's definition of translation error and her description of the hierarchy of translation problems (1997). I describe the results of applying measurement tools to the Likɔɔnl translation of the book of Philemon. The tools were designed to identify potential translation errors and grade them based on the hierarchy of importance. The analysis is followed by a preliminary critique of *Skopostheorie* in relation to translation transparency, translation error, industrial consistency, language status influence on translation methodology, the ethical decision to translate, and postcolonial critiques of Bible translation.

Keywords

Bible translation, *Skopostheorie*, functional translation, translation error, translation problem, translation brief, translation quality, adequacy, transparency, host text, Ghana, Philemon, translation ethics, loyalty, language status, foreignization, domestication, postcolonial

1. Using *Skopostheorie* in Bible translation quality assessment

Skopostheorie has been increasingly discussed and applied as a viable framework for Bible translation.² I have tried to describe how it can be implemented in a minority language context in Ghana (Esala 2011, 2012, 2013). In the Likɔɔnl³ translation project, the implementation of *Skopostheorie* occurred alongside more traditional methods of translation production. One can see that the “Lines of Production” described in the Likɔɔnl translation brief (Esala 2011, 11-12) are very similar to the translation quality methods that have been used in most Bible translation projects for the past number of decades.⁴ However, *Skopostheorie* itself conveniently provides concepts and methods for defining translation quality so producers and critics alike can discuss to what extent the host text⁵ is or is not adequate to the instructions laid out in the translation brief. In this paper I am going to compare the Likɔɔnl translation of the book of Philemon to its translation brief using the concepts of adequacy, translation error, and the hierarchy of translation problems within functional translation (Nord 1997, 73-77).

I should emphasize that based on the methods of translation production as described in the Likɔɔnl translation brief (Esala 2011, 11-12) the host translation has already been deemed adequate for publication. What I am trying to do here is to suggest a

¹ An earlier version of this paper titled “The Ethics of Transparency: Measuring the Adequacy of the Host Text” was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Baltimore, MD, November 25, 2013.

² Many theorists have been advocating using the *skopos* approach for Bible translation, including de Vries 2001; Naudé 2002; Wilt 2003; Wendland 2004; Maxey 2009; van der Jagt 2010; Peng 2012, Crisp 2013.

³ The Likɔɔnl language (Komba) is a Gurma language of Northern Ghana, part of the macro language family of Likpakpaaln (Konkomba). The people are called Bikɔɔm while the speech variety is Likɔɔnl. Both the people and the language are known in English as Komba. They are part of the larger Konkomba ethnic identity. In this paper the language will be referred to as Likɔɔnl and the people as Bikɔɔm.

⁴ The process of translation included source text study, drafting in written form, community checks, consultant checks, and computer publishing checks.

⁵ I am using the term “text.” However, I do not presume all translation involves a written text. The host text could be a recording or a transcript of a performance, or even a text stored in memory.

new way of measuring translation quality based on concepts within *Skopostheorie* itself. I had not done this at the time of the formation of the translation brief. This paper is intended to look forward to explore ways Bible translators could measure adequacy and quality during the production process.⁶ I am only looking backward at the Likoonl translation, which has already reached the point of publication, to provide a practical example with which I am familiar. I will also address some of the ethical concerns I have from using *Skopostheorie* in Bible translation in a minority language and in a marginalized cultural context.

1.1 The ethics of this inquiry

Before moving on with the content of the paper, I should ask whether this inquiry itself is ethical. Who has the ethical responsibility to judge translation quality and by what standards? Simon Crisp has suggested that this is the era of localization, and that standards should be locally defined rather than universally applied (2013).⁷ In so far as the translation brief reflects the host community's desires, and in so far as the questions I am asking actually represent and serve the host community's concerns, then this could be an ethical process. Nevertheless, I recognize that I influence how I re-present the community in my invested representation of their concerns (Spivak 1988, 275; Esala 2011, 9). Therefore my judgments here are my own and only meant to be suggestive for possible future directions and not definitive about the state of the Likoonl translation.

1.2 A description of *Skopostheorie*

Skopostheorie, as an extension of Action Theory (Reiß and Vermeer 2013), describes translation as trying to accomplish action in the host⁸ context. Translations are motivated by some kind of intention. Therefore the initiators or commissioners of a translation should tell the translators about the action they envision the translation will invoke in the host context. Why translate this literature? The formal expression of this intention as it is imagined playing out in the host context is called the *skopos* or purpose of the translation. For *Skopostheorie*, the translation of a text is a new publication, a new offer of information about a former offer of information.⁹

Producers may have intentions that may not be realistic in terms of local reception of their intention. It is then left with the translator(s) to dialogue with the producer(s) about the way the translated product will likely function in the host context. After dialoguing about the translation instructions, the translator has the ultimate decision whether or not to participate in the translation. In section 0 below, I will discuss broadening the ethical decision of whether to translate to include all the translation participants.

1.3 Adequacy as an assessment of translation quality

The first translation issue to address from a *Skopostheorie* perspective is the use of the term "adequate" as a marker for translation quality.

Skopostheorie dethrones loyalty to the source text as the *sine qua non* for measurement of translation quality (Nord 1997, 25).¹⁰ It considers complete equivalence between source and host text to be too optimistic, especially when it comes to translating different communicative functions (1997, 34-36, 45, 51).¹¹ Rather than full equivalence there are gains and losses in translation. But this does not mean an abandonment of standards for translation quality (Crisp 2013). Rather the translation brief offers criteria for how to measure the adequacy of a translation. The translation brief provides a place for people to critique the principles of the translation. It is also a place to describe and limit a translation's scope for the translators.

When a translation is drafted or produced, the written text, recording, or transcript can now be measured to see if it is adequate to the instructions laid out in its translation brief. After the relationship between the host translation and the translation instructions has been described, the next step would be to analyze how a translated text is or is not accomplishing the intended goals in the host context. See section 0 below. The focus of this paper is on measurement between the brief and the host text. As

⁶ In section 0 below I will discuss developing a streamlined tool for checking a translation against its brief.

⁷ Localization need not be understood as each community being a law unto themselves. Local communities do benefit by participating in dialogue with other localities. They may be unaware of ways to engage ideological issues which overtly or covertly influence them. However, prioritizing local agency suggests that "consensus" for action is reached at the local level rather than imposed from the international level. See also section 8.4 below.

⁸ Rather than using the term receptor language or receptor context, I am following James Maxey (2011, 2013), who applied the metaphor of hospitality such as host language, and host text, to Bible translation. For the use of the term in translation studies see Bermann and Wood 2005. For an early usage of the term see Sridhar and Sridhar 1980. For a broader view of hospitality and translation in the thought of Paul Ricoeur as applied to Bible Translation, see Shadd 2013.

⁹ In this way, *Skopostheorie* bears resemblance to translation as re-writing. See Lefevere 1992.

¹⁰ Elsewhere I have discussed the ethical constraints the source text places on the translator(s), and how source text interpretation should be described in the translation brief (Esala 2013, 303-304). In practice I have found that when translation is sensitive to local interpretive concerns, as *Skopostheorie* suggests, it is possible to discover aspects of the source text and context that had been previously ignored or downplayed by interpreters with different interests.

¹¹ *Skopostheorie* describes equivalence as a static judgment of equal value at certain communicative levels (Nord 1997, 36). Anthony Pym regards equivalence as still relevant and necessary for translation even though he sees equivalence as a social illusion (2010, 165).

part of the measurement, I will also consider the translator's ethical responsibility to circumvent the translation brief, if ethically necessary.¹² See sections 2 and 3.5 below.

2. Guidance for measurement in functional translation

In functional translation, a translation error is a failure to carry out the instructions implied in the translation brief and an inadequate solution to a translation problem (Nord 1997, 75). I prefer to call them "potential translation errors" because it is quite possible that the translators intentionally subverted the brief because of their ethical constraints to be loyal to the host audience or to the source authorities. Or the translators may simply have interpreted the hierarchy of the principles in the brief differently from the evaluator.

Within functional translation, translation problems and translation errors are evaluated according to a hierarchy of importance (76-77). *Pragmatic translation problems* are the most important. They depend on extra-textual factors which are described in the translation brief. I highlighted six components of pragmatic error from within Nord's description: translation type, sender-specific features of the original author, sender or receiver orientation of the translation functional unit, sender-specific features of time, medium, and place. A pragmatic error cannot be determined by looking at the host text alone. Instead someone with translational competence needs to look at the source and the host text in light of the translation brief (76). That means these crucial mistakes are the easiest to hide!

Cultural translation problems are culture-specific norms and conventions. I identified five types of cultural translation problems in Nord's writing: translation conventions, text layout conventions, genre conventions, poetic conventions, measurement conventions, and non-verbal behavior. General conventions include headings, titles, versification, paragraphs, and sentences. Translation conventions refer to what an audience considers "good translation."

Linguistic translation problems occur when there are mistakes in language structure such as vocabulary, syntax, or supra-segmental features such as discourse markers. Typically, Nord grades these errors as lower-level errors; however, if these errors affect the understanding or function or offend the audience's preferences such that a translation's function is affected then these errors are raised up in importance.¹³

Text-specific translation problems are isolated to a particular source text: figures of speech, neologisms, or puns. They are text-specific in that they are not part of a general cultural convention.

Nord includes these four types of error. I want to investigate a fifth type of error, which Nord mentions when she discusses *Skopostheorie* in relation to literary texts. These potential errors are related to special features of *literary translations* (92-94). Since the texts of the Bible have been analyzed as literary (Alter 1981; Rhoads 1982) with aesthetic oral-aural features (Wendland 2004, 2008), it seemed helpful to me to include these features as a potential source of error to see if the other four categories already cover the factors brought to the fore by the special literary nature of translation. The description Nord offers for literary translation include: hermeneutical interpretation, text function, cultural distance, form and effect, fictional characters, and intonation and focus.

So based on this advice, we ought to design our research with a hierarchy of the translation problems in mind. If the translation brief calls for an instrumental translation, the problems of cultural conventions are raised to a higher level of concern than in a documentary translation.¹⁴

What must not be missed here is that in a *Skopostheorie* framework, pragmatic errors regarding time, medium, and place are generally of higher importance than linguistic errors (Nord 1997, 76).¹⁵ However, in Bible translation projects, it seems to me the amount of time, effort, and money spent on linguistic correspondence has far outweighed the amount of research put into issues of medium, for example.

3. Research design

In designing the research, I utilized the Research and Instrument Design Tool (RAID) (Nahhas, Keltall, and Mann 2011), which utilizes a "ladder of abstraction"¹⁶ to help the researcher ask the more abstract higher-level question and relate it to more concrete measurable research probes.¹⁷

¹² In *Skopostheorie*, the translator is not handcuffed by the translation brief. The ethical constraint of loyalty is of a higher order than the translation brief (Nord, 1997, 123-35; Esala 2013, 303-304).

¹³ Many Bible agencies have stories of entire printed translations being rejected over what appear to cultural outsiders to be minor linguistic or cultural issues such as the spelling of a name, or choice of a particularly charged word. This illustrates how any "lower-level" error can potentially be raised to the highest level of importance.

¹⁴ For a discussion of instrumental and documentary translation, see Nord 1997, 47-51. In relation to domesticating and foreignizing translation approaches in Bible translation, see Esala 2013, 305-306. For an argument that prefers foreignizing approaches in Bible translation, see Joubert 2002.

¹⁵ Nord lists some situations where this may not be the case. If the purpose of a translation is to test language proficiency or cultural proficiency, then linguistic or cultural errors may be of higher importance than pragmatic errors.

¹⁶ The ladder of abstraction was adapted by Nahhas, Keltall and Mann from material found in De Vaus (1986).

3.1 Research purpose

The research purpose is to measure the presentation of text signs in the printed Likɔɔnl New Testament by comparing the translation decisions to the translation instructions in the translation brief. I limited my inquiry to the book of Philemon.

3.2 Research goal and research question

The research goal is to identify and grade translation errors in the book of Philemon based on the hierarchy of translation problems in *Skopostheorie*. The research question essentially turns this goal into a question: What is the severity of “translation errors” in the Likɔɔnl New Testament in the *Skopostheorie* framework?

3.3 Concepts and indicators

The concepts for measurement are the types of translation problems or translation errors listed in section 0 above. The descriptions that Nord gave for each type of translation problem helped identify the indicators. There are several indicators for each concept mentioned in the description above.

3.4 Instruments, probes, and criteria

For each indicator there should be an instrument or a tool to help measure the indicator. The probes are “the actual data collection components that make up the instrument.” The criteria are the specifications that lead to answering the research question (Nahhas, Keltall, and Mann 2011). It is helpful to decide ahead of time what the answer to a criterion will mean in relation to the research question. So for instance, I indicate that a “yes” answer means that there is not a translation error, and a “no” answer would indicate that there is a potential translation error.

3.5 The ethical constraint of loyalty

When considering whether something is a translation error, a researcher must keep in mind that in the *Skopostheorie* framework the ethical constraint of loyalty is a higher obligation than the translation brief (Nord 1997, 123-25). Thus a translator may circumvent the brief on purpose. In that case, it would not be a translation error, but an ethical decision. For each potential error I attempt to consider this possibility.

4. Research methods

I designed instruments to measure each of the indicators under each rubric of translation problem. All of these instruments were administered either by me or another researcher who was competent in translation principles and in the languages of English and Likɔɔnl.¹⁸ See sections 0 and following in the Appendix for a sampling of these instruments. The book of Philemon alone was used as a test case.

5. Reporting on the results

5.1 Concept 1: Pragmatic translation errors

Pragmatic errors are the highest order of error in *Skopostheorie*. Six indicators of pragmatic translation errors listed in section 2 were selected for comparison.

5.1.1 Summary of pragmatic errors

The tools I used under the rubric of pragmatic errors were designed to highlight potential errors with respect to extra-textual factors that impinge upon the way the host audience will engage with the ancient communication.

The issues of time, place, and medium show no major problems as the text thoroughly appears appropriate for reading and reception in church, which is the primary goal listed in the *skopos* of the Likɔɔnl translation brief (Esala 2011, 8). The secondary goal of the translation requires a broader social analysis over time, which is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁹ The tertiary goal for

¹⁷ The RAID analysis for the questions relevant to this paper can be found below in the Appendix, section 0. The RAID tool was designed to be used in sociolinguistic language survey. I think it is also appropriate for evaluating a text in its context as defined by *Skopostheorie*.

¹⁸ While I designed the instruments to measure the linguistic translation errors, the comparative analysis was done by Weston Leabee, who speaks both English and Likɔɔnl fluently, and who understands the linguistic vocabulary and grammatical constructions well enough to be able to compare them as they are naturally used in speech in both languages.

¹⁹ The secondary goal is a social goal, which states the translation should serve as a symbol of ethnic and cultural uplift and unity. This goal clearly affects how the translation will function but is quite complicated to assess because it involves pragmatic, cultural, and linguistic issues. An assessment could include an analysis of social registers as signaled in the translation. It also would include extra-textual issues such as the social effects of the translation linked to annual gatherings of chiefs and leaders on the annual Likɔɔnl Literacy Day, a social assessment of the New Testament’s launch and ongoing usage in diverse strata of society, the connection to locations and relative success or failure of community-based literacy classes, usage in schools. From the stand point of ethnic unity, an assessment could include the identities and involvement of the translators, reviewers, and governing

the translation, which addresses issues of building “oral” aesthetic features²⁰ into the host text, was less clearly present in the translation.

The indicators of translation type and sender or receiver orientation deal with translation typologies. The instrument tries to measure the host text to see if it exhibits characteristics of a documentary or instrumental translation. The Likoonl translation brief suggests the translation should be a homologous instrumental translation (Esala 2013, 306). That means the host text should attempt to achieve analogous functions in comparison with the source text.

The tool pinpoints the following areas as potential errors. I have correspondingly made suggestions for improvement. Translators might consider explaining the practice of house churches that meet in the homes of a benefactor such as Philemon in the introduction or a footnote. Also perhaps the introduction could speculate on the possible social relationship between Paul and Philemon so that hearers more easily catch the veiled nature of Paul’s request for Philemon to send Onesimus to him. The metaphor “fellow soldier” could have been changed with an appropriate cultural substitute to avoid misunderstanding. Lastly, the use of the word “spirits” in v. 25 may need to be deleted so as not to make the closing blessing overly exotic. I do not think issues of loyalty are relevant here, except possibly in the translation of the word “spirits.”

5.2 Concept 2: Cultural translation errors

Cultural errors refer to implicit cultural conventions in the source and host contexts and their functions. Because the translation brief calls for an instrumental translation, cultural errors are of higher relevance at least equal to pragmatic errors (Nord 1997, 76). The indicators are listed in section 0.

5.2.1 Summary of cultural errors

My analysis reveals that the host audience’s preferences for how their Bible will relate to other translations have been taken seriously. The category of printed Bible fits the way the Likoonl Bible will appear in terms of its cover, paper, section headings, and versification. In relation to literary-rhetorical conventions, such as alliteration, *inclusio*, chiasmic structures, and paronomasia (Maxey 2005; Wendland 2008, 207-82), the translation brief called for the translators to consider carrying over the artistic (formal) features of the source text when they were rhetorically (functionally) comprehensible in the host text. This has been done. However, more work could have been done to build up artistic features in the host text that function in an analogous way, especially when a literal translation of the source text’s rhetorical features does not communicate well. Too often such artistic and rhetorically potent features are simply dropped and not replaced.

A greater consideration of appropriate non-verbal behavior in the host context must happen if the translation considers how it will be performed orally or in dramatic media through gestures of greeting, blessing, and entreating. Also, since there was no direct host concept for the ancient genre of a letter of recommendation between estranged parties (Wendland 2008, 217-18), perhaps by using the format of drama, a translation could explore adapting the host conventions for mediating discourse as is done in the chief’s palace.

5.3 Concept 3: Linguistic translation errors

The analysis of linguistic translation errors reveals an undue reliance on the grammar of English, but it is unlikely that these potential errors will inhibit the translation from accomplishing its objectives of reception and use in the host community.²¹ See section 0 below. However, these potential errors make it clear that this is a translated text, not so much conceptually but grammatically. Lawrence Venuti argues that this is a positive thing, so that people recognize a text as translated and thus realize a translator was involved and therefore not invisible (1995). Venuti’s claim will be discussed further in sections 0 and 0 below. Prior to further translation work, it may also behoove the translators to test the linguistic comparison offered by this study to learn which constructions are more natural and preferable to host audiences.²² Additionally, a greater analysis of linguistic registers and dialect choices might provide a better handle on how subtle or overt linguistic signals could more deeply affect social reception.²³

committees. It might also include an analysis of the translation in relation to cultivating intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic peace or exacerbating conflict. As I said, some of these indicators may have overt or covert signals in the translated text itself.

²⁰ I recognize the difficulty in labelling a feature as “oral” or “written.” Scholars have shown that there is not a closed set of features one can call oral and not written. I am referring here to utilizing in the written translated text the discernible speech registers used in oral performance of Likoonl oral poetries.

²¹ I recognize, however, that a text can be rejected by a host community for reasons that are not immediately apparent to cultural outsiders.

²² A natural language corpus analysis may help reveal to what extent different grammatical options are used in the host language.

²³ How do dialect choices and signals of gender or social class affect unity and acceptance or rejection by different strata of society? Are the dialect signals varied or homogenous throughout the breadth of the translation? Are the signals which are present received as psychologically inclusive or alienating?

5.4 Concept 4: Text-specific translation errors

This concept refers to figures of speech, neologisms, or puns that are unique to this type of text. In Philemon we found a pun and a figure of speech. The pun was lost in the translation, while the figure of speech was adapted for the host context with translational gains and losses. I don't see any major errors in this category.

5.5 Concept 5: Literary translation errors

Of the six indicators for literary translation error listed above, only two indicators helped uncover new sources of error that were not previously identified under other categories. Those indicators are the hermeneutical link between the real world and the textual world, and the use of intonation and focus.

5.5.1 Summary of potential literary translation errors

Considering the hermeneutical link between the Βικωμ hearers' real world experience of slavery and the textual world's depiction of slavery uncovered a new potential error. There is some similarity and some difference between these two experiences of slavery. However, the paratextual information does not ask the readers to consider their own experience of slavery in relation to this text nor does it give any extra data about the institution of slavery in the ancient world. Similarly Nord's analysis of literary error helped me see that the translation could have made greater use of marking intonation and focus through features like underline, bold, and italics.

Both of these potential errors may be due in part to issues of loyalty to the host audience. The local issue of slavery has the potential to spark fighting between clans between whom this is an issue. The use of bold, italics, and underlining would make the text look different from other translations and be difficult to teach new readers. I do not think these potential errors will impede the translation from functioning in the ways the brief expects. However, there should be some way to address the issue of slavery that could bring about healthy dialogue. There may also be a way to address intonation and focus through performance of the texts.

6. Analysis of adequacy

In section 0 I summarized the potential errors in the book of Philemon from a *Skopostheorie* perspective and ranked them in terms of importance related to the communicative function of the host text. These potential errors are only suggestive and not definitive. Based on that analysis even though there are suggestions for improvement, I believe the translation is still likely to function in most of the ways the brief expects. Therefore, in my opinion, using the concepts of translation error and the hierarchy of translation problems from within the writings of Nord about *Skopostheorie*, the translation of Philemon in Likωnl is adequate to its brief.

7. Next steps for implementing *Skopostheorie*

7.1 Streamlining the tools

The next step I would like to take to develop the tools used in this analysis is to streamline them so that there is only one major tool that helps translators think through potential translation errors from a *Skopostheorie* perspective. Such a tool could be used on a book by book basis as a kind of checking against the translation brief. Also the tool might highlight weaknesses in the translation brief so it can be improved through usage.

7.2 Observing the function of the host translation

The next phase of implementing and evaluating *Skopostheorie* as an extension of Action Theory (Reiß and Vermeer 2013) would involve actual empirical observations of how the host text is functioning in its host context, and perhaps also whether it is positively engaging relevant theological, ethical, and religious issues in the host context (Gentzler 2002, 197). Researchers should not necessarily assume a linear relationship between intention and actual usage. They should leave open the possibility that the host audience can use a translation in ways unanticipated by the brief (Sanneh 1989; Dube 1999; West 2007). Before undertaking such an inquiry, researchers should ask for what ends are they performing the inquiry, and whether they have the responsibility for such an inquiry.²⁴

8. Some ethical observations from using *Skopostheorie*

In this section I will address a few ethical issues that have surfaced from implementing *Skopostheorie*. These issues are not necessarily isolated to *Skopostheorie*, but could be relevant to the use of other translation frameworks as well.

²⁴ I would like to thank Jim Laesch, the Translation Director of Lutheran Bible Translators, for highlighting this ethical concern.

8.1 Transparency as openness to critique

Bella Brodzki has suggested that there are two ways to understand transparency in translation. Transparent can mean invisible, insignificant, devalued, and clandestine. It is this kind of transparency that Lawrence Venuti argues results in the marginalization or invisibility of the translator (1995). Alternatively, I am using transparent in Brodzki's second way as describing open operations whose methods are visible and accessible to all (2007, 8).

Opening the door to discussing our translation operations is important both in terms of self-criticism and openness to criticism from outside the translation participants.²⁵ Such a move forces us to think carefully and honestly about the seriousness of translating. However, in this power oriented world I admit that full transparency is not possible or desirable. Some contexts and translation initiatives may require less to be spelled out in writing and more to be communicated according to the principle of relational loyalty. Nevertheless, transparent and relational operations are an ideal to work toward.

8.2 Defining "error" contextually and relationally

The relationship between transparent operations as described in the brief and relational loyalty comes into play in the way *Skopostheorie* defines translation error. The concept of error and accuracy in our day presumes a printing press model which uses a high degree of industrial precision in determining what counts as the same or what constitutes distortion. Foley argues that error and accuracy do not have to be understood only in terms of textual accuracy as culturally defined in a printing press media environment (Foley 2012, 36-39, Pathways Project 2011).²⁶ Rather than relying on an objective static definition of translation error, Nord defines translation error as a failure to carry out the instructions implied in the translation brief (Nord 1997, 75). This pragmatic definition is trumped by the translator's ethical constraint of relational loyalty to concrete people who represent the source text and host community (Nord 1997, 123-25; Esala 2013, 303-304). The benefit of this definition and its powerful caveat is that translation accuracy and translation error are understood in relation to the context and the *skopos* described in the translation brief. Nord's relational ethic surrounding a written document is analogous to contemporary ways of describing the relationship between texts and oral tradition (Foley 2012, 255-62).²⁷

8.3 Oral consistency versus computerized consistency

Despite what I see as potential ways to negotiate differences of media in *Skopostheorie*, printing press assumptions influence applications of *Skopostheorie*. For instance, *Skopostheorie* generally assumes that it is good for a translation to be intratextually consistent. It seeks to apply translation in a principled, regular but not rule-based fashion (Nord 1997, 68). This is logical—if it is good to translate this way once, why not always translate the same way? However, in applications intended for an oral dominated context which interpret consistency in a less rigorous way, it is possible to create a set of *skopoi* which would allow for variations within a functional translation unit. I will go farther to suggest that the printing press makes translation producers work towards consistency in their texts in ways that are not appropriate for contexts that are dominated by an oral medium of communication.²⁸ Once practitioners recognize that the ideology of the printed text does not have to dominate in predominantly oral communicative environments, *Skopostheorie* can be leveraged to prioritize the ideology of the preferred medium.

A similar issue came up in my analysis of functional translation units. Despite the desire to be consistent, some variation within functional translation units may be helpful for reasons of compromise among different factions or simply another way of doing things that might strike individual preferences differently. We need to consider the possibility of too much industrial consistency in our use of *Skopostheorie* or any translation approach in the post-Gutenberg era.

8.4 Domestication, foreignization, and language status

The next issue I want to consider is how *Skopostheorie* deals with the issue of language status. Translation studies and postcolonial theorists are very concerned with issues of language power. Translation theorist Anthony Pym has claimed that functionalism, of which *Skopostheorie* is a subcategory, generally assumes a language equality which patently does not exist in the real world (Pym 2007, 208).

²⁵ Nord (2006) has also made a similar argument, and suggests that all translations are ideological whether they realize it or not.

²⁶ A great example of this is given by Raymond Person in his discussion of Old Testament textual criticism. Oral sensibilities and oral aesthetics regarding what constitutes sameness do not match well with literate sensibilities (Person 1997, 603-604). This is especially the case with a printing press view of accuracy. This is why Foley argues for a more abstract concept of accuracy to mean "taking care of" rather than defining accuracy exclusively in terms of textual accuracy (Pathways Project 2011).

²⁷ Foley conceptualizes the relationship of textuality, orality, and electronic media as *agoras* or marketplaces. This metaphor focuses on media as places of exchange that operate according to uniquely defined rules relevant to the media marketplace. The marketplaces are not mutually exclusive, but overlap and relate to each other, and yet each marketplace has an inner logic that shapes the exchange. I wish to acknowledge the presenters at the Intersemiotic Translation Seminar 3, "Bible Translation Pathways: Oral Tradition and New Media," St. Louis, MO, September 30–October 4, 2013. For this paper, especially relevant was the contribution of Dan Fitzgerald.

²⁸ This may even be true for dominant languages like Chinese (Peng, personal communication.)

In this vein, postcolonial theorist Talal Asad has argued that languages are not all equal in terms of their tendency to colonize. Asad points out those languages with lower status and less power from the developing world are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process (1986, 157-58). Asad's observation about submitting to forcible transformation shares some aspects of Lawrence Venuti's critique of domesticating translations, where host texts transform the form and content of the source text to the extent that they hide the fact that they are translations, making it sound as if the translation is a natural text in the host language. Venuti argues such translations render the translator invisible (1995, 1-2). Bella Brodzki engages Venuti's critique by wondering whether the host language always exercises undue power in relation to the source language. Are not other ideological positions possible in specific translations (2007, 9)?²⁹ For example, Robert Young has suggested that when translating from a colonizing language such as English into a colonized language, a domesticating strategy that prioritizes the host language may be appropriate (2013).

Bible translators can further consider how language power and status might affect translation methodology. While *Skopostheorie* encourages the local community to decide how to deal with language hierarchies in their translation strategy, the manifest problem is that the community may be largely unaware of their choices, and likely feel powerless to go against the ideological flow. The choice to use an instrumental (foreignizing) or documentary (domesticating) translation typology is not ethically neutral. Such choices have ethical implications in the local culture that ought to be considered in the shaping of the translation brief.³⁰ Issues of cultural power and language status, not only translation typology, should come into the dialogue surrounding the specific applications of *Skopostheorie* to help translation participants consider how their translation choices submit to and/or subvert established hierarchies. More research needs to be done on the specific situations in which existing translations engage institutions and issues of power and what effect the translations have on culture (Gentzler 2002, 197). See section 0 above.

8.5 Shared responsibility

The fact of language and cultural inequality reveals why it seems unfair to me to suggest that the translators alone must bear the ethical weight of whether to translate a text or not, especially when the balance of power between the initiating and funding agencies is not equitable (Pym 2012, 167). Translation organizations cannot expect that cultures and translators will always look out for the best interests of the host culture. And thus the ethical responsibility of whether and how to translate should include the translation producers as well as the translators. Translation participants may not be aware of the issue of language status unless the methodology they are using considers language status as relevant to translation methodology.

8.6 The translation brief as mitigating the consuming of colonial bombs

For me personally, it was the postcolonial critique of Musa Dube (1999) that influenced me to positively consider *Skopostheorie* and in particular the translation brief as a locus to address and mediate postcolonial concerns. Dube has claimed that missionary translators have been complicit with colonialism and inscribed in their translations ways of denigrating the colonized culture and worldview. She calls this consuming the colonial bomb.

It would be naive of me to suggest that making one's intentions more explicit helps avoid inscribing the colonial bomb in translation. Setting a *skopos*, creating a translation brief, and following through on a brief in an ethical relationship of loyalty do not protect against that. After all, we are often unaware of our own sin. There are forces at work in the postcolonial world that are larger than all of us.

However, in writing the brief we are making an attempt to be ethical to the best of our ability, to be self-aware, and to address challenges placed before us on the front end. At the beginning, along the way, and at the end of the day we must trust the Spirit—some of the bombs being set (wittingly or unwittingly) may actually be liberating in ways no one can anticipate (Sanneh 1989).³¹ That is not an excuse to be lazy, but rather a recognition of our human limits and propensity to sin. But in so far as we are aware of ethical issues, the translation brief and relational loyalty are concepts translation participants can use to promote better translational, ethical, and theological dialogue between multiple parties who stand equal in their common humanity before God, but who also stand in asymmetric power relationships in the world.

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²⁹ Similar critiques of Venuti's position have been issued by Douglas Robinson (1997, 136-37) and Edwin Gentzler (2002, 205-206).

³⁰ The appearance of a binary choice between domesticating or foreignizing is misleading. Translations may apply one of the strategies to a certain extent in relation to a translation problem and the other approach to another extent in relation to another problem or even in relation to the same translation issue. Nevertheless the distinction is useful as long as one realizes they are generalizations that can even work in tension.

³¹ Historians are in better positions to debate these issues retrospectively. I am thinking here of the debate between Sanneh (1989) and Jean and John Comaroff (1991).

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Appendix

The following are samples of the research design and tools I used to address translation quality from a *Skopostheorie* perspective.³²

1. Sample of Research and Instrument Design tool (RAID)

Purpose 1: Assess the selection and presentation of text signs in the printed Likoonl New Testament by comparing the translation decisions to the translation instructions in the translation brief.

Goal 1: Identify and grade translation errors in a selection of the New Testament in the Likoonl (aka Komba) language based on the hierarchy of translation problems in *Skopostheorie*.

Research Question 1: What is the severity of "translation errors" in the Likoonl New Testament in *Skopostheorie* framework?

Concept 1: Pragmatic errors exhibit a lack of awareness of the translation situation. They are extra-textual in nature. (Note these errors are generally of the highest import in *Skopostheorie*. They are also generally invisible to a reader who is only looking at the host text.)

Indicator 1: Translation type: instrumental or documentary translation of a functional unit of translation found throughout the New Testament

Instrument 1: Have a translation/linguistic expert read a pericope (Philemon) and mark all aspects that cannot be adopted as they are, but need to be explained (documentary) or adapted (instrumental).

Probe 1: Mark whether an item was mistakenly adopted "as is," whether there was a documentary explanation of the source situation, or whether there was a functional adaptation in the direction of the host culture.

Criteria: If adopted as is, was this adequate to the brief? No = potential error; if it was adapted, was this done adequately? No = potential error

Concept 2: Cultural translation errors

Concept 3: Linguistic translation errors

Concept 4: Text-specific translation errors: figures of speech, neologisms, puns

Concept 5: Special features of literary translation errors

2. Concept 1: Identifying and evaluating "pragmatic translation errors"

2.1 Indicator 1: Translation type

In this measurement, I as a translation/linguistic expert read a pericope (Philemon) and marked translation units that are potential translation problems, which if adopted as they are, may need to be explained (documentary), or they may require adaptation for the host context (instrumental). I then looked at each translation decision to see if the unit was translated as is or if it was adapted. In each case I asked myself whether the "as is" decision or the "adaptation" decision was adequate to the instructions in the translation brief. I also considered strategies to bridge gaps in footnotes, book introductions, or extra explanations in the text. Finally, I also considered the translator's ethical constraint of loyalty before identifying a translation error.

³² For the full Research and Instrument Design Tool which covers five concepts, and for the full array of tools I used in this analysis, please contact the author.

Note: All of these binary judgments are not as binary as they seem. The criteria are often mixed and require an “is this adequate” kind of answer. I only say “no it is not adequate” when it is going against the instructions of the brief, and when it is clearly going to bring some misunderstanding in the mind of the audience.

Table 1. Translation type

Number	Verse	Description	1	2	3	Comments
			Adopted As is? (Y/N)	If 1 is Y, was this adequate?	If 1 is N, was it domesticated adequately?	
			Y = 2 N = 3	Y = good N = error	Y = good N = error	Explain error analysis.
1	1-2	author/ addressee convention	Y	Y		Source convention adopted, with slight adjustment to receptor.
2	1	prisoner	Y	Y		Strange for Paul as a Christian to be a prisoner; handled in introduction.
3	2	fellow soldier	Y	N		Some may not realize metaphorical usage; an adjustment could have been made while retaining the metaphor.
4	2	church in your house	Y	N		The concept of house church is not explained.
5	5	love, faith	N		Y	Nouns turned to phrases; reorder faith and love.
6	5	saints	N		Y	Key term consistent throughout, emphasizes chosen people, “set apart” idea.
7	6	source assumes verb from 4	N		Y	Verb repeated for hearers, host language adaptation.
8	6	fellowship of faith (rich point of <i>koinonia</i>)	Y	Y		Fellowship is described as “sharing” faith, can also mean tangible items, not only evangelism.
9	7	refreshed the bowels of saints	N		Y	Followed NIV, translators also claim “hearts” has to do with tangible physical support.
10	8	discourse break “therefore”	Y	Y		
11	9	appeal on basis of love	Y	Y		Appeal in Greek is similar to “I beg you” in Komba.
12	9	I Paul – self reference	Y	Y		Highlights emotion, foregrounds his ethos for his request.
13	9	an elder who is a prisoner for Christ	Y	Y		Brings out pathos and dissonance of Paul’s situation.
14	10-11	meaning of Onesimus	N	Y		Footnote describes meaning which shows up in vv. 11 and 20.
15	11	useless / useful	Y	Y		
16	11	metaphorical use of “son”	Y	Y		
17	12	focused word order	N		Y	Reordered in way that brings out the tension for Kombas.
18	12	who is my heart	Y	Y		Slight addition of the word “heart person” makes more clear.
19	13	hypothetical / pathos	N		Y	Reordered, the hypothetical is brought first.
20	13	mitigated wish	Y	Y		
21	14	deferential to Philemon	Y	Y		Communicates well.
22	15	hypothetical reason	Y	Y		
23	16	slave to dear brother, man and brother	Y	Y		The social implications are clear.
24	17	fellowship	N		Y	Change fellowship to fellow worker (picks up on a theme from elsewhere in letter).
25	18	wronged you	Y	Y		
26	18	debt	Y	Y		Cost of a slave clear.
27	18	charge it to me	N		Y	Let the debt or cost follow me.

28	19	Paul officially signs debt	Y	Y		
29	19	I will not say	N		Y	I will not think.
30	19	yourself to me you owe	N		Y	The host text makes this stronger, I own you.
31	20	Onesimus play on words	N		Y	Footnote in v. 11 plus use of word in v. 12 picks up meaning in v. 20.
32	20	Paul wants something from Philemon	Y	Y		Tangible item linked to spiritual refreshment, same phrase as v. 7.
33	21-22	two statements are connected	Y	Y		Paragraphing highlights that these are connected.
34	21	you will do more than I ask	Y	Y		Does the audience realize this may be his hint in v. 13? Maybe. Left implicit.
35	22	prepare a guest room	Y	Y		This is a bit of a accountability, Paul will follow up on this.
36	22	I hope to be granted to you	N		Y	Host text makes God as actor explicit in passive verb.
37	23-24	greetings from others	Y	Y		
38	25	your spirits	Y		N	This seems to be a bit of Christian-ese. The convention is familiar because of church culture in English. Not very natural Komba.

The table has identified two potential translation errors, numbers 3, 4, and 38. How highly do they rank in terms of misapplying the translation type?

2.2 Indicator 2: Sender-specific features of the original author

For this indicator I asked two main questions. First, how does the host audience's knowledge or lack of knowledge about the author affect the way they interpret the text? Second, what attitudes are present in the author that the receivers may or may not understand? I then created another table and went through the text of Philemon asking myself these questions. For every issue I identified, I looked at the host translation to see what they did. Did they translate as is? If so was that adequate in the new host context? Did they make an adaptation, or provide supplemental information in the text, a footnote, or in the introduction?

Probe 1a: How does the host audience's knowledge or lack of knowledge about the author affect the way they interpret the text?

Probe 1b: Is this a problem that is addressed in the introduction, a footnote, or supplemental material? If ignored = potential translation error.

Probe 2a: What attitudes are present from the author that the receivers may or may not understand?

Probe 2b: If they cannot understand the attitudes, how is that overcome? If ignored = potential translation error. Check loyalty concerns.

Table 2. Sender-specific features of the original author

Number, Table 1 ()	Verse	Issue	Indicator 2 Probe 1a	Indicator 2 Probe 1b	Indicator 2 Probe 2a	Indicator 2 Probe 2b
1	1	No mention of Paul's status or credential may indicate a lower status vis-à-vis Philemon or an eschewing of convention	Probably miss this point, though it is normal for them as well	Ignored	Possible eschewing of conventions regarding titles	Ignored
2 (0)	1	prisoner	Strange for Paul, as a Christian, to be a prisoner.	It is not mentioned in this book intro, but in others.	Paul mentions this humiliating thing.	Ignored, but picked up in other Pauline lit.
3 (0)	2	fellow soldier	They may not realize metaphorical usage and think Paul is a soldier of some kind.	Ignored	None	
4	3-7	Paul's attitude as paterfamilias: blessing, concern for the well-being of the saints	Well-understood in culture		Paul's responsibility to bless, provide	Well-understood; their elders act this way.

5	8	Paul's authority	Understood		Mentions right without enforcing it is still a weaker form of volition.	Well-understood
6	9	Paul's situation as elder and prisoner	Instills sympathy—should be.	Understood implicitly	Perhaps: Paul is saying really the youth should be suffering this on Paul's behalf.	Understood implicitly
7	10	Paul's appeal for O as an elder	Instills a necessity to acquiesce in Philemon—should be.	Understood implicitly	Paul is hinting that O. is valuable to Paul not only Ph.	Understood
8	11	useless useful, change in Onesimus' value	The more they read Paul the more they may realize he is a great crafter of rhetoric and is "up to something" here.	Footnote	Paul is potentially being a bit subversive; this may not be a normal begging Philemon to forgive O, but something more.	There is a footnote in v. 10 that may help here.
9	12-13	Paul's love for O	Paul is an apostle, a pastor, and they do mediate conflicts.	Understood	Paul seems to say he would rather keep O with him. (veiled request)	Potentially understood
10	14	Paul acknowledges PH's right to consent.	This is inline what they would expect of Paul	Understood		
11	15-16	speculation as to why God allowed O to run away	They would expect Paul to bring God's perspective in.	Understood	This is possible and would be an acceptable solution to Paul (on these terms).	Understood
12	17-19	Paul is "paying" Philemon for Onesimus	Shows Paul's great character.	Understood		
13	20-21	Paul's wish for a benefit			Paul wants Philemon to release O to him to come back and work with Paul.	This may or may not be understood. Kombas are good at subtle communication.
14	22	prepare a guest room	Paul wants to retain a relation with PH over this issue.	Understood	Paul is threatening/reminding that he is likely to come and check up.	Makes sense to Kombas.

Analysis: Problems that may not sufficiently be dealt with include numbers 1, 2, 3, 9, and 13.

2.3 Indicator 3: Receiver or Sender orientation of a vertical translation unit

In this instrument I broke up the text of Philemon into functional units following Nord's suggestions (1997, 68-72). The sentence is broken down into phrases, noun phrases and verb phrases that cohere conceptually. Then each chunk or coherent unit is marked for the type of information it carries. Nord identifies four functional units: topic, features specific to the type, sender orientation, and receiver orientation. I did this first for the Greek text followed by the host text. The goal here is to see how functional units are represented at different levels of communication and how they correspond to each other in the source and host texts.

Thematic: SMALL CAPS

Features specific to the text type: Underline.

Sender orientation: *Italics*

Receiver orientation: **Bold**

Probe 1: Where are the same functional units being used in different ways to serve the same global purpose and to solve the same translational problem?

Criteria: Attempt to identify these in Philemon.

Probe 2: Does this recognition of global patterning suggest a better solution?

Criteria: yes = potential error. No = no error.

1 * Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ /καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός^a /Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ /καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν 2 * καὶ Ἀπφίᾱ τῇ ἀδελφῇ¹ /καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν /καὶ τῇ *κατ’ οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ*,^b 3 * /ΧΑΡΙΣ ΥΜΙΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ/ ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν /καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

lp w 1 **Min** Pɔɔl, wan ye uloondiikɔɔr Masiya bu-n, / nin ti na a big Timoti / **le sɔb kugbɔn nan**.

lp **Ki tenn** ti jɔ kpaarimɔɔn, Filemɔɔn / wan ye ti toontunn kpiegin, w 2 / nin ti ninsa Apifie, / nin Achipusi wan ye ti tɔtogkpieg / nin biwonjiem a laguɔ ban labin a niin nin:

lp w 3 Ti **Baa Uwonbɔr** / nin ti **Yudaau** Yisa Masiya/ a NYUNYUNBASANL NIN NPOSɔɔN / **li be ni bu**.

Thematic orientation: GRACE AND PEACE ends up having the same focus in both texts, but it is reordered linguistically in the host text.

Text-specific: The person who writes the letter and the person who receives the letter is also thematic orientation; in Greek this is marked simply by case and a knowledge about the genre of letter writing. In Likɔɔnl we had to show explicitly who was writing the letter and who was receiving it by adding verbs. The underline is bolded because it shows special receiver orientation in the host text which the source text does not have.

Sender Orientation is marked in italics. In Greek I marked everything related to Paul and his sender orientation in italics. Any concept that would have been foreign in the Mediterranean culture (insider language for Christians) I also marked as sender orientation. This would include Christ and church. In the host text more data are in italics because there is more that appears foreign to the Bikɔɔm hearer than it would to the original Greek hearer, such as “fellow soldier” and “church that meets in your home.”

Receiver Orientation: In the Greek text I marked everything that was oriented towards Philemon and the original recipients of the letter, such as Paul’s use of the prefix συσ- “fellow” which highlighted the equality between Paul and the recipients. I also included terms like familial terms, the Greek words for God and Lord that would have been familiar to the audience as part of Mediterranean culture. In the Likɔɔnl text there are many words or phrases that were added to help the new recipients understand the text, as well as the same familial terms and the accessible terms for God and Lord which are from the receiver cultural worldview.

Analysis: What I discovered is that if I define the receivers as those people who represent generic Mediterranean culture then the receiver orientation becomes clearer in its correspondence to the Bikɔɔm audience. If however, one assumes Philemon and the house church as the standard for receiver orientation then the comparison breaks down. The original recipients obviously understood the letter as complete insiders. The Mediterranean cultural readers who heard the letter after it was distributed more broadly did not immediately share the insider language of Paul and his community. They had to be introduced to it through the letter. Imagining early Mediterranean recipients in this way puts them in an interpretive position in terms of familiarity and strangeness that is quite similar to the modern Bikɔɔm audience.

2.4 Concept 3: Linguistic errors

The goal of this tool was to identify where the host text may have used unnatural grammatical constructions according to host language standards.

Table 3. Unnatural constructions in Likɔɔnl

Table Number	Verse	Issue	Suggestion	Is this unnatural?	Is this understandable?
1	1-2	listing recipients using “and”	Repeat the verb each time you add a recipient.	Breaks host convention. This is actually a cultural error, not linguistic.	Yes, but wrong cultural convention.
2	4-5	<i>nan bu-n</i> causal construction	Move the causal marker to end of the cause.	Yes. The translation appears to be imitating the English word “because.”	Yes, but it is not as natural and appears a bit clunky.
3	7	verbs into gerund noun	Use the direct verb.	No. Perhaps the translation is a bit more “marked” as it stands.	Yes. It may be a style preference. Some corpus research would help to see how often the gerund is used.

4	10	marking time reference in a relative clause	Move the time reference to the end of the clause rather than at the beginning.	No.	Yes. Again a corpus study would help to see what is more natural.
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Since none of the constructions inhibit understanding we can say that they hopefully will not affect the overall communicative purpose. And I can say many of the suggestions were discussed in the translation process. That is to say, the translation team and the reviewers were aware of these issues. Nevertheless, I believe these potential errors should be evaluated in terms of host community preferences before moving forward in further translation.