

Alternative Evaluative Concepts to the Trinity of Bible Translation¹

*Linguistic hospitality, then,
where the pleasure of dwelling in the
other's language is balanced by the
pleasure of receiving the foreign
word at home, in one's own
welcoming house.*

– Paul Ricoeur

Introduction

Translation Studies (TS) has questioned the validity and value of equivalence as a goal and measure of translation for several decades. I argue that equivalence is related to a set of criteria for translation assessment: accuracy, naturalness, and clarity; and that these too should be questioned. Nevertheless, these criteria remain the mainstay of quality assessment for much of the world of Bible translation (BT). Beyond their relationship to equivalence, these assessment criteria reflect a bias towards print translation that is inadequate for translation beyond print. Initially BT was restricted to the print medium. However, over the past decades various types of non-print translations of the Bible have been produced, but they continue to be evaluated according to the same concepts as those of print translation that follow from a paradigm of equivalence. This essay explores these relations and looks more deeply at alternative evaluative concepts that anticipate multiple media from the perspective of the metaphor of hospitality: carefulness, authenticity, and transparency. These assertions are explored from the perspective of biblical performance translation.

¹ An earlier presentation of parts of this chapter was given at the fifth IATIS conference in Belo Horizonte Brazil on 7 July 2015.

Beyond equivalence and back

Anthony Pym (2010: 6) describes TS's relationship to equivalence in this way:

In the course of the 1980s ..., the equivalence paradigm came to be regarded as naïve or limited in scope. Mary Snell-Hornby, for example, jettisoned equivalence as presenting 'an illusion of symmetry between languages which hardly exists beyond the level of vague approximations and which distorts the basic problems of translation'²

In TS the move away from equivalence included an understanding of translation as manipulation and rewriting (see for example Hermans 1985; Lefevere 1992).

Equivalence was unattainable and, in fact, was no longer a goal of translators who sought to demonstrate their agency through their translational choices. Translations were viewed as valid literary contributions outside of their relations to source texts. Even the concept of the original was put into question:

[O]nce we start to consider the way in which both the terminology of translation and the idea of an authentic 'original' that exists somewhere beyond the text in front of us are used by writers, then the question of when a translation is or is not taking place becomes increasingly difficult to answer (Bassnett and Lefevere 1996: 39).

These paradigmatic shifts in TS called into question the evaluative concepts of accuracy, naturalness, and clarity.³ Natural domesticated translations were accused of hiding translators' identities and their colonial agendas. In addition, the assumption that translations were to be clear - disambiguating the options for readers - demonstrated a modern view of monovalent meaning. As for clarity, a singular authorial intention and

² Pym, along with others such as Mona Baker, continues to use the term 'equivalence' (see Kenny 2002: 77–80).

³ Descriptive Translation Studies and especially Polysystem Theory as presented by Itmar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury opened the way to explore translational norms that did not think in terms of absolutes or limiting comparisons to source and target in translation. Adequacy and acceptability were terms proposed in such contexts along with proposals for norms in translation (see for example Toury 2012).

readers' capacities to decipher this text-bound meaning was assumed. Each of these assertions about accuracy, naturalness, and clarity was not tenable from a TS perspective.

At the same time, these evaluative concepts became reinforced in BT as is evident from the marketing of Bibles that assured consumers of faithfully accurate translations from the original texts, translated in clear and natural contemporary language. For example, the Common English Bible's preface states, 'The CEB translators balance rigorous accuracy in the rendition of ancient texts with an equally passionate commitment to clarity of expression in the target language' (CEB 2011: XIII). The ideologies held to maintain these evaluative concepts promote the unchangeability of the Bible and at the same time assert the 'infinitely translatable' nature of the Bible (Walls 1996: 22).

BT and quality assessment

Since the middle of the twentieth century there has been an historic increase in the number of language communities hosting the translation of the Christian Bible (Noss 2007). This increase coincides with institutional developments in BT with commonly held goals, strategies, and methods.⁴ Eugene A. Nida's sea change in BT in the mid-20th century by suggesting dynamic/functional equivalence instead of identity of form (Nida and Taber 1969) eventually came under scrutiny by TS scholars. Although Nida's functional equivalence was primarily interested in modern audiences having equivalent responses to the Bible's message as those of antiquity, Nida did open the door to meaning equivalence when he stated: '... meaning must be given priority, for it is the content of the message which is of prime importance for Bible translating' (Nida and Taber 1969: 13). In addition, this type of equivalence was supported by Nida's componential analysis and the so-called conduit model of communication, following generative linguistics' notion of the kernel (Nida 1975). Other Bible translators latched on to the notion of equivalent meaning and, once they did, the criteria for assessing translations became entrenched as accuracy, naturalness, and clarity (see for example Beekman and Callow [1974]1984; Barnwell 2002; Larson [1984]1997). The resultant epistemological assertion along with subsequent meaning-based strategies has been critiqued not only by TS but

⁴ See for example the statements of basic translation principles from the Forum of Bible Agencies International: <http://www.forum-intl.org/resources> [accessed August 14, 2015].

also by cognitive linguistics and alternative inference-based communication models of translation such as relevance theory (see for example Gutt 2000; Wilt 2003).

A prime and influential example of this canonized trinity of BT comes from a BT manual first published in 1975, subsequently translated into French and Spanish, and used by thousands of BT practitioners (Barnwell [1975] 2002: 24, emphasis in original):

A good translation should be:

ACCURATE The translator must re-express the meaning of the original message **as exactly as possible** in the language into which he is translating.

CLEAR The translation should be **clear and understandable**. The translator aims to communicate the message in a way that people can readily understand.

NATURAL A translation should not sound ‘foreign’. It should not sound like a translation at all, but like someone speaking in the natural, everyday way.

The archives of the journal *The Bible Translator* have scores of articles that assert and assume these criteria. Take for example the 1977 article on ‘The Good News Bible Translation Principles’ (TBT 1977: 410):

Accuracy, which is the first and central aim of the translation, is measured by the degree to which the reader of the translation understands the meaning of the text in the same way as the reader of the original text did. The following principles are to be applied in the structuring of the English text:

1. The language is to be clear and natural, according to the canons of good American English usage.

Such criteria were used not only to guide translators, but also to review translations (Newman 1980: 325, emphasis in original).⁵

The two basic criteria for evaluating any translation of the Scriptures are *reliability* and *readability*. A translation must first of all be reliable in that it

⁵ Elsewhere from the same author: ‘But no matter how miserably we may fail in any other aspect of our task, we must above all else be faithful to the meaning of the original’ (Newman 1987: 411).

faithfully and accurately represents the meaning of the original text as found in the best manuscripts available. But a translation must also be readable. It must reflect the natural idiom of the intended audience, and it must be within the range of their expectation and comprehension.

With multiple other BT publications over the years having assumed and asserted the trinity of BT quality assessment with accuracy, naturalness, and clarity, numerous consequences of such evaluative concepts can be noted. Meaning is singular and located in the text and can be discovered and transferred without changing. Translation's influence is viewed as unilateral –from source to target/host language. Translation is viewed primarily as comparing a target text to a source text to determine what is lost; gains in translation are seldom discussed and often only as critiques. Translations and translators are viewed as neutral and their work objective – thus, having the goal of not influencing the translation process. All such assertions correspond to claims of equivalence and a modernist view of meaning. These claims and views are routinely questioned (and condemned) in TS today. For example, Edwin Gentzler and Lawrence Venuti are highly critical of BT and its theoretical assumptions (Gentzler 2001: 44-48; Venuti 2008: 16-18). Poststructuralism addresses much of this in terms of questioning author intent and proposing receptionalism, whereby gaps of indeterminacy are interpreted by readers/audiences. However even when notions of meaning, descriptions of translation, models of communication, and the objectivity of translators are problematized, often the same criteria of quality assessment are promulgated in BT: accuracy, naturalness, and clarity.⁶

Evaluative concepts beyond print

Despite its historical roots in orality, the Bible in the modern era is often synonymous with the printed book. Theories, principles, and methods of translation were developed with the assumption of the print medium. This assumption reinforced the criteria for the evaluation of translations. Non-print translations of the Bible (into song, theatre, and film, for example) were designated 'adaptations' and not considered 'faithful translations',

⁶ Although not supported universally in TS, these criteria can be looked to for particular purposes from the perspective of *Skopostheorie* (Nord 1997: 31-33).

Take for example the following explanation to the question, ‘Is the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* biblical?’⁷

Upon closer inspection, however, the biblical failings of *Jesus Christ Superstar* become apparent. When a story is retold, a certain amount of interpretation is required. The author’s ideas, presuppositions, and opinions are injected. In this retelling of Jesus’ passion, the character and motivations of both Jesus and Judas are re-imagined and reinterpreted.

The critic’s assessment of such retelling and interpretation is generally negative with a cumulative summary: the opera/film is not a faithful translation. Indeed the question of fidelity or faithfulness of non-print biblical material became more prominent towards the end of the twentieth century in BT circles. Two important volumes demonstrate the issues and ways to respond to such issues from a variety of perspectives (Hodgson and Soukup 1997; Soukup and Hodgson 1999). One of the chapters’ titles addresses this issue head on: ‘Faithfulness: A Wider Perspective’. Yet, this approach seems to be a reiteration of Nida’s theory a generation earlier (McFry 1999: 7):

In the field of [Bible] translation we define ‘accuracy’ and make judgments about it in terms of our understanding of the principles of functional equivalence. We say that a translation is accurate, and therefore faithful, if the present-day receptor in his situation responds to it in the same way as the original receptor did in his situation, in terms of his understanding of the meaning and his feeling about the message.

Research for BT beyond print has continued in recent years by framing the issue in terms of inter-semiotic translation (IST).⁸ To date, four IST seminars have been held and as the name suggests, a primary theoretical underpinning has been that of semiotics. As a result,

⁷ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Christ-Superstar.html> [accessed 6 August 2015].

⁸ Although coined by Roman Jakobson (1959: 232–239), the term is used here to differentiate translation other than print and suggests that semiotics (in all its approaches and perspectives) is a helpful way to address these types of translation.

accuracy has been understood differently: ‘Beyond a print-definition of accuracy, fidelity can be understood as faithful to a genre, or medium’ (ISTS 2012: 6). One of the IST seminars focused on the work of John Miles Foley, a classicist and oral tradition scholar. One of Foley’s contribution to the discussion of evaluative concepts of translation comes from his Pathways Project, a website that models the similarities of oral traditions with the internet. Foley’s distinguishes three types of communicative environments: Oral (oAgora), Textual (tAgora), and Electronic (eAgora), comparing them to Greek classical marketplaces – *agora*. He indicates the following with regard to accuracy:

A tricky concept, *accuracy*. And very often a code-word summoned to praise tAgora activities while denigrating transactions in the oAgora and eAgora. We’re told that oral traditions can’t preserve history accurately, for example, or that the web is far too subject to change or multiplicity to be a really dependable medium. We’re asked to subscribe to (literally, to ‘underwrite’) the credo that text is the only possible vehicle for safely and faithfully conveying the immutable data we need to run our cultures. Beware the oral and the virtual; fidelity lies solely in brick-and-mortar. Or so goes the widespread and enduring myth of Textual Accuracy. ... At root, accuracy simply means ‘taking care of.’ It may come as a surprise, but there is nothing fundamental in the term itself that mandates textual definition. The English word derives from Latin *accuratus*, with the meaning taken care of, exact.⁹

Foley’s premise is that one should take into consideration the medium when defining accuracy:

In regard to media, then, there are no perfect and complete – no universally accurate – representations. There is only a selection of lenses, each of which offers a particular kind of accuracy, an idiosyncratic take on

⁹ <http://www.pathwaysproject.org/pathways/show/Accuracy> [accessed August 6, 2015], emphasis in original. There is also a book publication that parallels the website (Foley 2012).

reality. From this principle it follows that a lack of [textual] accuracy in the oAgora or eAgora should be not necessarily be interpreted as an error or shortcoming, but, at least potentially, as its own, agora-specific brand of accuracy.¹⁰

These discussions of media's influence on translation and evaluative concepts for translation call into question the viability of the equivalence paradigm's evaluation criteria of accuracy, naturalness, and clarity. Rather than working from a paradigm of equivalence, I suggest that an assessment of translation could be better articulated from a metaphor of hospitality. Below I sketch out evaluative concepts based on this paradigm.

Hospitality's evaluative concepts

The metaphor of hospitality asks us to consider the other. For Derrida, hospitality evokes distinctions of the other as invited or a visitor. And the host cannot only be viewed as one who freely welcomes but also due to laws of hospitality can in a real sense become the hostage. Obligated hospitality can make for a hostile host. Derrida suggests this ambivalence with the French expression *pas d'hospitalité* (which can mean 'a step of hospitality' or 'no hospitality'). He (2000: 123–25) suggests the role reversals of hospitality:

So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the master of the host. The guest becomes the host's host. The guest (*hôte*) becomes the host (*hôte*) of the host (*hôte*).

Ricoeur (2006) is the one who suggests 'linguistic hospitality' as a way to talk about how the other is received in translation. In TS the concept is profoundly discussed by many – from Friedrich Schleiermacher ([1813]2004: 49) to Antoine Berman (1984) to Lawrence

¹⁰ Ibid.

Venuti (2008) who talks about domestication and foreignization, or as Bella Brodzki (2007: 8) puts it, estrangement.

With regards to BT, hospitality entered discussions with the term ‘acceptability’ (see for example Nida 1988).¹¹ Rather than comparing with the source text or the target/host language, acceptability extends beyond a linguistic category of evaluation. In many ways it is a marketing question. Translations that are deemed accurate, natural, and clear could be rejected by the host community. The reasons vary. At times it’s the materiality of the translation – the quality or colour of the cover or of the print or paper. Sometimes it’s due to the orthography used. Sometimes there are ideological reasons: a term is deemed to belong to a certain sector of the community. For example, in the Vuté NT translation project in Cameroon there was a discussion between the Protestant and Catholic translators as to which word should be used for Jesus’s relatives – cousins or siblings. Whereas the trinity of BT – accuracy, naturalness, and clarity – comes from a paradigm of equivalence, acceptability seems to belong elsewhere. I would suggest that it belongs to a paradigm of hospitality. I am quick to pre-empt those who may think I consider hospitality unequivocally benevolent. As Derrida suggests above, hosts can be taken hostage by their guests. In the BT context, there has often been such an insidious reversal. Foreign guests have often become the ones to demand and determine the type of evaluation necessary for translation (see for example Rafael 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

What does a paradigm of hospitality consist of for BT? I would propose the following: carefulness, authenticity, and transparency. Borrowing from Foley’s Pathways Project, we learn that the word accuracy has etymological roots in carefulness. Care needs to be given to the oral traditions as they are brought into new circumstances. As suggested above, Foley asserts that the term ‘accuracy’ needs to be problematized according to the social interaction sites in which humans communicate and conduct business (Foley’s *agora*) of each particular tradition. Therefore, textual accuracy has different features and values from that of oral or electronic accuracy. From a paradigm of

¹¹ Acceptability was a discussion much earlier in TS, with Gideon Toury’s work on translational norm (see for example Toury 1978).

hospitality, carefulness becomes something significantly different than print-based accuracy.

Using a term like ‘carefulness’ has some drawbacks. One might think that this is a type of warning to ‘keep hands off’ the tradition or text. Such an attitude is due to a fear of damaging the object of care. But this is far from what is meant here. Carefulness should not make a translator hesitant or afraid to ‘touch the text’; rather, it is motivated by engagement in manipulating it with care. Another misunderstanding of carefulness might be related to the idea of caregiving in a context of caring for the elderly. The aim with such caregiving would be to maintain the identity and wellbeing of those in a care facility. However, the carefulness proposed here does not aim at keeping things the same but at anticipating change. This type of change is done with care as traditions encounter newness. This encounter does not disregard the past as it looks to the future. Yet it does seek newness from the past into the present, a type of Bhabhaian hybridity (Bhabha 1994).

Authenticity underscores the fact that the host community, its language, its medium, and its mediator remain self-differentiated in translation. Discussions of world literature raise the issue of a community’s identity when their minority culture is swept up with a world language translation (see for example Apter 2013). Likewise, global canons of literature can threaten a minority community’s identity (see for example Bailey and Pippen 1996). Both threats come from a type of colonization. Authenticity, therefore, is a question of power relations and ideologies. Such threats have been addressed by translation strategies (see for example Venuti 2008: 32-34; Gentzler 2008: 1-7). From a cultural identity perspective, a translation is judged by how the host community’s authenticity remains intact. This is not an attempt at an unchangeability of identity; change is inevitable, but to remain authentic is the aim.

Authenticity also has to do with the language used in translation. This is similar to the classical concept of ‘naturalness’. The aim here is not to create an unnatural ‘translationese’ whereby the use of such language, style and discourse is not found elsewhere in the community’s literary polysystem. More will be said on this under transparency, but I limit the discussion here to the posture of the host language in relation

to the foreign language. While respecting the foreign, the host must not lose self-respect, or put otherwise, authenticity.

Authenticity also addresses the issue of medium. In fact, the renewed interest in performativity and the suggestion of a performance turn in TS underscores the need to look beyond equivalence and its quality control criteria to concepts that support translation beyond print (see for example Bermann 2014). A translation intended for print must be dramatically changed for another medium. Authenticity in this case of medium suggests remaining true to itself. Each medium has its own set of internal parameters to communicate not only naturally but also authentically. We have all experienced what is often called a ‘poor adaptation’ of a book into a film. The intersemiotic translation was not authentic to its new medium. A translation’s assessment must include an appraisal of the use of a medium’s parameters to demonstrate its authenticity.

Finally, the authenticity of the mediator/translator is of great value in a paradigm of hospitality. This value has been spoken about differently by several TS scholars. Generally, the assertion is for the agency of translator. The translator’s agency is evident by her translation choices that result in the translation. It begins with the decision to translate and continues with the selection of what to translate. From there, agency is demonstrated through the interpretive nature of a translator’s mediation and negotiation. To lose oneself as a translator (or to become invisible à la Venuti) is to become inauthentic. The BT industry is notorious for not giving credit to the translators – except when a translation is done by one individual.¹² With modern-day committee translations of the Bible, recognition of translators is fleeting. Consider the projects of the revised New International Version and the Common English Bible. Both projects make clear (on their websites) who is involved in translating the Bible.¹³ In this case the translators’ visibility as theologically conservative biblical scholars is meant to assure accuracy to a source text. Although this demonstrates a certain authenticity, it seems to me that the argument from both of these projects’ websites is to demonstrate to stakeholders how the translators are not altering the biblical text. In other words, the translators’ visibility is

¹² Twentieth century counterexamples would be Kenneth Taylor of *The Living Bible* and Eugene Peterson of *The Message*, along with historic examples of Martin Luther.

¹³ <http://www.thenivbible.com/about-the-niv/meet-the-translators/>;
<http://www.commonenglishbible.com/explore/our-scholars> [accessed 10 August 2015].

ephemeral in only becoming visible long enough to declare that the translators are ultimately invisible in the translation.

To speak of transparency from a paradigm of hospitality is suggestive of translating alterity. A paradigm of hospitality suggests that alterity must be recognized and visible in some way through the translation. A translation of material that is so utterly foreign to an audience today (such as the Bible) has to decide how it is going to treat such alterity. Domesticating the Bible would remove traces of its alterity. A host that does not recognize/reflect the otherness of the guest but seeks for her to be identical with him is one that is disrespectful and ultimately not hospitable. This is not a return to a dichotomy of foreign vs domesticated, but an acknowledgment that although a translation is a re-creation, it is nevertheless a translation of something other.

Timothy Beal (2013), in his paper on translating alterity in relation to Emmanuel Levinas, assesses the situation for BT in this way:

Indeed, throughout most of the history of Bible translation, and especially in the equivalency-based common-language approaches that have dominated the field for over half a century, ‘translating alterity’ has meant reducing the text’s otherness to sameness, familiarity, fully present and available meaning. Such approaches to translation recall Levinas’ critique of western philosophy’s ‘insurmountable allergy’ to ‘the other that remains other.’

Following Levinas’ distinction between ‘saying’ (*le dire*) and ‘the said’ (*le dit*), Beal suggests the following (see for example Levinas 1969, 1985, 1998):

In the same way the pre-ontological saying, as openness to the other, is present but not accounted for within the said, can we conceive of a translating within the translated, that is, as a presence that destabilizes and unsettles any pretense of closure or total equivalence in the translation?
Translation as a hosting of a new saying in the said, leaving room for what

is excluded, the presence of an absence, recollecting the unassimilable remainder that unsays what's being said?

Philip Towner argues in favor of alterity with regard to BT ('Hearing voices' 2–3; see also 'Resonance, Dissonance, Resistance' and 'Translating Alterity'):

Fluency itself is not the problem; rather to be lamented is the erasure of all traces of foreignness in the text or dialogue, and along with them the voice of the foreign Other, with its potential to communicate something new, even if jarringly strange, to a receiving cultural discourse ... The exciting hazard to be faced in this process of transfer in the case of literature is that the Other voice, upon entering the polysystem, would alter the systemic chemistry, dislocating and relocating preexisting voices in the new discursive environment as it claims its space.

Linguistic, cultural, and temporal distance from the composition of the biblical texts and their translation in today's world presents many challenges. These challenges are generally understood as resolved when we can tame this foreignness by making it sound familiar. The troubling result could be that hearers and readers project their contemporary cognitive maps onto completely dissimilar situations. Transparency does not have this goal. Again Towner: 'The foreign voice emits a discernible "difference" that colloquialization and domestication can suppress or censor altogether' ('Hearing Voices', 22). Transparency as an evaluative concept to (Bible) translation does not require a uniform strategy or *skopos* for translation. It does, however, require that one address the issue of the alterity of the source text. The degree to which alterity is ignored is the degree to which the quality of the translation is diminished.

This proposal of a paradigm of hospitality is the result of thinking about translation beyond a print perspective. Previous evaluative concepts such as accuracy, clarity, naturalness – all coming from a paradigm of equivalence – were not broad enough for non-print translation. Thinking beyond print pushes us to think beyond text-bound parameters for translation. As Bassnett and others have remarked, embodied

performances can be helpful in stretching our ideas about what translation is and how to evaluate it (Bassnett 2014: 153–157).

Bible translation performance

Above we looked at Foley's research on oral tradition along with how semiotics has contributed significantly to the IST seminars. These seminars have in particular looked at the issue of performance and translation. Translating performance problematizes the goal of recuperating the past in translation. If it is accepted that certain biblical material was performed in antiquity, there is an acknowledgment that what remains – a written text – is only part of this ephemeral performance (see Maxey 2009). The performance itself cannot be recuperated. Therefore, for practical purposes, one limits oneself to recuperating the written text as much as possible. This has been the historic goal of BT – especially since the Protestant Reformation.

But what if the goal for BT was not that of recuperation? What if the goal of BT was re-creation? What if the translator's glance was not retrospective but rather prospective? What if the measurements of quality were not the trinity of BT emanating from a paradigm of equivalence: accuracy, naturalness, clarity? I suggest that performance translation helps us imagine other ways of viewing translation. As André Lefevere (1992) and others since him have suggested, translation should be viewed as rewriting, as a creative act.

Such reposturing of the translator to look forward rather than backward changes many things. But in some ways, this reposturing is what is required when a translator takes her audience into consideration. As much respect as a translator might have for the source text and language of yesterday, translation by its very nature is intended for audiences of today and tomorrow. Taking into consideration the audience requires that translators create or re-create something new. And the question is not so much of fidelity to the past but rather is the translation acceptable or welcome in the present?¹⁴

In the 1990s and early 2000s, at the invitation of a national church, I was involved in BT in Cameroon. As a trained linguist I was involved in the linguistic research and

¹⁴ Admittedly, this is a progressive theological posture. It does not, however, dismiss the historical value of the Bible.

documentation of one of the 270+ languages of Cameroon – Vuté. I worked on developing with the community a writing system for this predominantly oral language. I worked with local communities on the translation of a variety of materials, including health brochures, traditional folktales, literacy curricula, and religious material – including the Christian New Testament (NT).

As in many BT projects in communities with a newly developed writing system, literacy was a difficult challenge. The reasons are many, ranging from the dominance of French in the region to the complicated tone-marking system of the Vuté orthography. These challenges reflect the history of the Bible and media. My particular area of interest begins with orality studies and expands to performance. I am interested in the historic realities of how media and Bible inform translation in terms of legitimation, goals, and methods. In particular, I am interested in how performance challenges our assumptions about the Bible and translation.

A decade ago I did field research on the relationship of translation done for print, translation done for performance, and performance as translation. This took place primarily in Cameroon where I worked with experienced Bible translators from the Vuté community. The research was comparative in nature. I first took sections of the pre-published Vuté NT. This was done with a print medium in mind where the audience was envisaged as individuals silently reading the printed biblical text. I compared this translation with a translation of the same passages that were completed by the same translators – however, the translation was intended as a script for performers. Oral features of the original Greek text were discussed along with rhetorical devices of antiquity. The verbal art of the Vuté language, culture, and register were explored. Thirdly, I examined transcripts of audio-visual recordings of live performances of these same biblical passages. The performances were diverse in setting and performers. These three ‘texts’ were the subject of my comparative research: 1) pre-publication NT; 2) performance script; 3) performance transcript. Results of the research described the differences in the three texts. Beyond the details of these differences, some comments about orality and Bible as well as observations on how one conceives of translation and performance can be made (see Maxey 2009: 167–192).

Oral tradition has always been under discussion with biblical studies – especially since the European Enlightenment (see for example Kelber 1983). However, it is only within the past thirty years that orality studies have had a noticeable impact on biblical studies.¹⁵ Such studies have been extended by performance with an eclectic approach called biblical performance criticism (BPC). This approach ‘Reframes the biblical materials in the context of oral/scrabal cultures of Judaism and early Christianity, aspects of which include the performance event, performer, audience, context, and text’.¹⁶ The claim of BPC is that initial biblical compositions were performed – performance in the sense of an embodied presentation that interacts with a communal audience. Such a claim dramatically challenges many of the assumptions of biblical studies that has oftentimes anachronistically projected a modern view of communication onto antiquity. In addition, BPC challenges biblical scholars’ thoughts about translation. For most involved in biblical studies, they view translation in a similar way as do many classicists - a philological exercise in which knowing the source language(s) is sufficient to doing translation. However, BPC suggests that this view of translation is inadequate. Given that several researchers of BPC are also performers for modern-day audiences, their view of translation is more audience oriented. Nevertheless, their view of translation remains in general a linguistic exercise. Interlingual translation is done for performance. Generally speaking, non-verbal communication (gestures, proximity, setting, etc.) is decided upon in an *ad hoc* fashion and is not considered a part of translation proper (contrary to Poyatos 1997).

My own research in this area has benefitted greatly from orality studies, ethnopoetics, and performance studies as well as several aspects of translation studies (see for example Ong 1982; Havelock 1986; Hymes 2003; Schechner 2002; Carlson 1996). I have two general assertions with regard to BT and performance: 1) performance is translation; 2) what we translate is experience. The first assertion leans heavily upon semiotics. The second assertion is related to the first in that performances are experienced. In turn, when we translate performance, we are translating an experience.

¹⁵ Bibliographical information available at https://www.zotero.org/groups/biblical_performance_criticism [accessed 14 August 2015].

¹⁶ <http://biblicalperformancecriticism.org/index.php/12-newsflashes/newsflash/12-what-is-performance-criticism> [accessed 14 August 2015].

As I have stated elsewhere (Maxey 2012: 14):

The strongest link between biblical performance criticism and intersemiotic translation is this: biblical performance criticism does not simply involve textual translation from one language to another. Biblical performance criticism understands that performance itself *is* translation. And the theoretical support for such an assertion resides with semiotics. Therefore, when Bible translation is discussed in a biblical performance criticism framework, it is important not to fall into the trap of thinking that the translation aspect only involves an exercise from biblical languages to some other language. Translation takes place in the performance, through sound, silence, gestures, and interactions with the audience.

One of my early memories of a performance of biblical material is the *experience* that I had. Subsequent performances provided for more experiences. And when I became a performer myself, my experiences expanded. Having an experience is not limited to participating in an embodied performance. We experience things as we read silently and alone. We experience films, recorded music, and social events. This has led me to think about what we actually translate. As much as we would want to say that we are translating a text, many, if not most of us, understand that we are translating our experience of a text. Even when we do background research on the socio-cultural contexts of when that text was produced, we nevertheless ‘read’ the text from our social locations.

With BT, we often see the source text – constructed texts that are the result of sophisticated scholarly research – as what we are translating. But even the manuscripts examined by text critics are the result of the scribes’ experience with previous manuscripts. And at some historical point when the first manuscripts were written, they were done so as a result of some performative experience. The technology of writing informed the intersemiotic translation of these experiences. This reflects the ongoing semiosis triangle (see for example Stecconi 1999; Hodgson 2007). Likewise today, when biblical material is performed, we can understand that these performances are

intersemiotic translation of previous experiences. Thinking in these terms, I think, frees up translators who are no longer translating a stable unchanging text, but rather are translating carefully a tradition that has become their authentic experiences of previous authentic experiences, while remaining transparent to the otherness of the earlier traditions.

None of this is done in a vacuum. Experiences are not all equal when located in asymmetric relations; nor are they all beneficial. The ethics of translation, or more specifically of translators, becomes crucial. The history of BT underscores this. This is what we see when well-intentioned missionaries colluded with colonial conquerors over the past two to three centuries. We see similar ethical questions in play with World Literature today where national literatures can be colonized by world languages. Such questions do not call for a moratorium on translation. However, they do make us more aware of the ethical issues at play in what is translated, by whom, for whom, in which medium and so on (see for example Pym 2012). Perhaps the notion of hospitality can help us think through these issues.

Hospitality's evaluation of biblical performance translation

How might hospitality's evaluation criteria of carefulness, authenticity, and transparency assess performance translation? This question merits a response with more space than is available here. Rather than speaking about this in vague scenarios, I assess briefly below the experience of performance translation in the Vuté community with passages from the NT.

Carefulness to the tradition was demonstrated by determining that the point of departure for such translation was with the canonical written text of the NT. However, this text was qualified by understanding that this written text was a translation of several experiences. In antiquity stories were told and received by audiences who in turn performed them for other audiences. Such performances were eventually selectively written down. Once written, others experienced these texts, making copies and additions (and revisions) through the centuries until textual critics made available in the twentieth century the source text for the Vuté translators – generally mediated through several printed French translations. Such a process was understood by the translators, who

comprehended that both care and human mediation are a part of the source texts. The Vuté performance translation was careful to carry on this tradition while asserting its own authenticity.¹⁷ Ideophones were added to the translation script (while not a part of the printed translation) (see Noss 1985, 2001). For example, when it comes to the action of the paralytic rolling up his mat as he stands and walks out in front of everyone, the performance translation script uses this expression: *hòòr hòòr hòòr* for the sound of rolling up the mat. The performers added interactive aspects to the translation to assure that the audience was following and engaged in the performance. For example, they would ask the audience a question to be sure that they were following the story up to that point: ‘You understand, don’t you?’. These are authentic parts to any Vuté oral performance. The performers’ language, gestures, and very presence (both proximity and settings) demonstrated the cultural authenticity of these performances as they were juxtaposed with Vuté oral traditions and folktales. For example, when the paralytic was healed this occurred ‘in their eyes’ (meaning in front of the whole crowd). This phrase was accompanied by the performer pointing with his index fingers to his own eyes. In fact, such juxtaposition helped the audiences assess how aspects of the performances reinforced or challenged the audiences’ identity.

Although authentic, it was clear that these performances were something other for the Vuté people. Performers reflected this by their creation of oral ‘footnotes’ – socio-cultural parenthetical statements that were not in the earlier translation scripts.¹⁸ Foreignness was evident throughout the performances, but it was accessible to the audiences by the mediation of the performers. Indeed the performers were translating not only by the language used but in the sense of helping the audience understand the foreign customs and concepts. Alterity was not domesticated, but was approached through descriptions and metaphors.

It would appear that the Vuté performance translations were hospitable. Asking if they were equivalent is nonsensical. The equivalence criteria simply were not established

¹⁷ Each of the following examples is taken from the passage of the NT of Mark 2.1-12 where four friends carry their paralytic friend to Jesus to be healed.

¹⁸ For example, during one episode, several people climbed up on the roof of a house and dug a hole in the roof. This could not happen with a typical Vuté house. The performer explained the type of house construction in antiquity that made such behaviour feasible.

to handle something like performance translation.

Conclusion

It is too early to determine how influential this research will be on the BT industry, but uniform allegiance to equivalence and its print-based criteria of quality assessment has been severely questioned. The use of such terms as accuracy, naturalness, and clarity continues to create a confusion of goals and evaluative concepts. For this reason, alternative criteria – carefulness, authenticity, transparency – from the metaphor of hospitality have been proposed. The next step in this project will be to assess various genres and media of translations – both from the sacred text and other types. The utility of such alternative evaluative concepts will become evident. What is clear at this point is that hospitality is significantly different from equivalence. Hospitality anticipates the agency and creativity of translators while negotiating source texts with host audiences. This generative metaphor offers space for consideration beyond assessment criteria to other ways of thinking about translation. What are the motivations for (Bible) translation? What is the relationship of the foreign guest with the host? How do media interact with the making of meaning? Such are the types of question still to address from a paradigm of hospitality.

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