

Framing Nida: The Relevance of Translation Theory in the United Bible Societies

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1. Is there a theory of translation?

Between the theory and the practice of translation there exists a particularly problematic, almost tortured, relationship. This is nicely brought out in a conversation between a translation theorist and a professional translator (Chesterman and Wagner, 2002). Wagner, the translator, is dismissive of the practical usefulness of translation theories that have been advanced to date. She is looking, in short, for something which is ultimately prescriptive. Chesterman on the other hand says that translation theorists have been trying to escape from the top-down prescriptive approach, as unscientific and unempirical, and moving to a descriptive and explanatory framework, something more akin to literary theory than to mechanics (p.2), a human rather than a natural science. Wagner is happy with observation and analysis but also wants to be guided, to have a common language and at least a tentative set of standards established (p.3), effectively describing a triangle of theory, practice and ethics. Chesterman's response is worth recording:

[O]pinions would be divided over the appropriateness of talking about guidelines and 'doctrines' here, as if the job of the theory was to advise people what to do. This approach has perhaps gone furthest in Bible translation, where there is a long tradition of guidelines and principles expressly designed to help future Bible translators...Many scholars would prefer to think in terms of hypotheses or generalizations or probabilistic laws, based on observation.

(Chesterman and Wagner, 1986: 4)

And his set of tools ranges from concepts like “deverbalization” (p.9-10) which could be described as vintage Nida, to “relevance” (p. 10) where he commends Gutt's concept of “interpretive resemblance” within a cognitive environment. This is precisely the span of my interest in this essay, in which I seek to investigate some of the historical developments in the way translation theory has been developed and used in the United Bible Societies.

So is there a theory of translation? The answer may seem obvious, but having been trained, originally, in the natural sciences, reading discussions of “translation theory” within Bible translation circles has usually left me unconvinced that what purports to be such a theory is in fact a theory in the scientific sense of the word, and doubtful as to whether such a theory can be found. My initial question itself conceals two questions: “Have scholars or practitioners of translation succeeded in describing a theory of translation?” and, behind that, “Can there be such a thing as a theory of translation?” This second, covert question is the more fundamental. Is translation a natural phenomenon, susceptible to direct observation and generalisation leading to empirical laws, or is it a deliberative social activity, open to sociological interpretation and description, leading perhaps to ethical guidelines or even prescriptive laws? Reading more broadly in the field of “translation studies”¹ I discover that both these questions are

¹ So called since Holmes' 1972 paper, “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies”, Holmes (1988): 67-80.

open and live issues in the wider community of both academics and practitioners. While there is work which much more closely resembles the movement of scientific study, from observation and description to generalisation and the formulation of “laws” (the work of Hatim and Mason (1990), Toury (1995) and Chesterman (1997) are just three examples), there remains a considerable variety of opinions on just what a theory of translation would look like (as the discussion in Chesterman, 1997: 42-46, makes clear). In the face of an increasingly interdisciplinary focus in translation studies, Arduini (2004) has called for an end to the boundaries imposed by disciplines and assumed by the concept of interdisciplinarity, and the development of epistemology as a network of interconnecting nodes. He sees theory as

a growing confidence in our ability to ask fundamental questions without hiding behind mere descriptivism...Theory, in this sense, happens when knowledge must be rethought and restructured. Doing theory represents a declaration of conflict; it is a subversive move that academic institutions may later turn into method....theory offers a critique of translation *ideologies* (Arduini, 2004: 9)

The distinction implied here between theory on the one hand and either description or method on the other, is one which is rarely appreciated or made clear in writings on translation, and one which will prove useful in the task of this essay.

While the wider world of academic translation studies remains the context of discussion, I want to focus here on the place of theory in the translation work of the United Bible Societies (UBS), over the four decades since the publication of Nida’s *Towards a Science of Translating* (1964) and Nida and Taber’s *Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969)². I will begin with a brief look at *TAPOT*, since this has undoubtedly provided the framework within which all discussion of Bible translation has taken place, both within and outside the UBS, and at the “normative” developments from that work. But Nida’s work has itself been framed: it has been understood differently by people in different contexts and continues to exert a strong influence within what is now a much wider understanding of the theory of translation within UBS. I will note some of the criticisms from outside the UBS which directly or indirectly stimulated reassessment of the accepted position, and will then attempt to track the role of theory in UBS translation practice by examining publications arising out of successive “Triennial Translation Workshops” from 1981 to the present.³ To conclude I will briefly examine the presentation and reception of Gutt’s (1992, 2000) relevance-theoretic account of translation within the UBS community, since it seems to bring to focus precisely the questions with which I began, at least as they apply to the world of Bible translation..

2. “Theory” in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*

² Henceforward these two works will be referred to as *TASOT* and *TAPOT* respectively.

³ Most of these workshops have resulted in the publication of a collection of significant papers in a volume entitled, *Current Trends in Bible Translation*, a special edition of the *UBS Bulletin*. My own personal involvement is limited to three TTWs – those at Chiang Mai (1994), Malaga (2000) and Iguassu Falls (2003). For the rest I rely on papers published in *Current Trends* or in *The Bible Translator* and on the memory of colleagues.

Eugene Nida's immense contribution to the cause of Bible translation has been noted, celebrated and assessed in a number of recent publications (Stine, 2004; and several papers in *BT* 56/1, 2005, especially Porter, 2005). In 1986 one critic of the dynamic-equivalence theory propounded in *TAPOT*, nevertheless said, "Nida's name dominates all literature on translation theory and not just that concerned with Bible translation." (Nichols, 1986:43) While the same would not be true today, his writings have shaped the translation practice not only of the United Bible Societies but of other organisations, such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), Pioneer Bible Translators and many others, and he is probably still the Bible translation scholar most frequently quoted in non-religious academic translation studies.⁴ But are the foundational works of Nida and colleagues based on a theory of translation? I suggest that they are not, at least not in the sense of a set of generalizations drawn from observation of translations or translators, leading to an explanatory framework. Rather they are based on a wide array of theoretical foundations largely in the area of linguistics and communication theory, and in particular on theories of lexical semantics, transformational grammar and a code or conduit model of communication.

It is instructive to note the increasing confidence of the titles of Nida's publications: *Bible Translating* (1947), *Towards a Science of Translating* (1964), *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969). But if we can allow Nida to critique himself, one of his more recent publications (Nida, 2001: 1-9) is so equivocal on the role of theory as to suggest that the apparent confidence exhibited in the 1969 title was illusory, and that he would perhaps prefer to revert to his 1947 title! Further, he says of *TASOT* that it

"reflects a number of different insights from different disciplines because no single discipline or theory can possibly provide the necessary insights to deal satisfactorily with the many faceted aspects of interlingual communication." (Nida, 2001:93).

The same comments accurately describe *TAPOT*, which developed a more pedagogical approach based on the insights of *TASOT*, more specifically applied to Bible translation. There are in fact three most important theoretical foundations supporting the proposed methodology of translation. It is based firstly and importantly on a theory of communication. In declaring the priority of "dynamic equivalence" over "formal correspondence", Nida and Taber assume a code model of communication, ultimately dependent on Shannon and Weaver (1949) (*TAPOT*, 22-24 and 163-65; in more detail in *TASOT*, 120-44). We shall have more to say about the model, as its shortcomings are the locus of much of the criticism of Nida's 'theory'.

Perhaps even more importantly, their basic paradigm for translation – analysis of the source language into kernel sentences, transfer to the target language, and restructuring of the target language kernels into an appropriate level of complexity – is ultimately based on theories of transformational grammar (*TAPOT*, 33-55). It is most important to the dynamic-equivalence model that surface form should be clearly distinguished from meaning, which resides at some deeper level. But, although this is undoubtedly dependent on Chomskian linguistics, Hatim and Mason (1991: 31) are wrong to suggest that Nida advances this as an explanatory model for the process which takes place

⁴ The most likely challenger for that title would be Ernst-August Gutt.

subconsciously when someone translates (thereby implying that it represents an empirical theory of translation.) In *TASOT* (68) and *TAPOT* (33) the three stage process is proposed as a conscious methodology of translation. It is clearly prescriptive not descriptive.

Thirdly, there is a theory of meaning on a word-level, which is strongly based on lexical semantics and componential analysis (*TAPOT*: 57-90). And while the chapter on “Connotative Meaning” (*TAPOT*: 91-98) may be seen as making some moves in the direction of pragmatic construction of meaning, even here contextual constraints are marginal rather than central. Words, and sentences, are containers for meaning, as is made clear in the analogy with packing the same clothes into different shaped suitcases (p.105).

Perhaps it needs to be said that as well as these three theoretical foundations, there are some other assumptions: Firstly the accessibility and priority of author’s intended meaning, because this is what must be translated. Secondly a postulate of translatability, which is really a theory of mind – that what can be said in one language can always be said in another, because human experience is at root universal. And while Holmes (1988:81-91) both commends and criticizes Nida for dealing mainly at the level of the sentence, there is already in *TAPOT* a recognition that texts are more than a collection of sentences and the seeds of a movement towards inclusion of discourse-structural features in translation strategy.

3. Development of Nida’s translation model in the field of Bible translations.

Nida’s basic framework for translation was developed and applied by most of those involved in Bible translation over a period of several decades. While ideas, such as the implications of discourse analysis for translation (eg. Smalley 1979, 1980), which were merely suggestions in *TAPOT*, became whole disciplines, the theoretical foundation of the separability of form and meaning, at both grammatical and lexical levels, remained essentially unchallenged. Wonderly (1969), while majoring on the sociolinguistics of common-language translations, accepted Nida’s three stage translation process “in theory” (p. 51). Nida himself reflected the importance of both transformational grammar and the code model of communication for the praxis he advocated (Nida 1972 a, b) while at the same time broadening its sociolinguistic basis (Nida 1972 c)

A number of widely-used SIL publications, while giving no explicit attention to theory, are clearly based on the same cluster of theoretical foundations. Beekman and Callow (1974) are deliberately pedagogical rather than theoretical, but they assume the priority of meaning over form, suggesting that the ideal translation is an “idiomatic” one, with a primary criterion of “fidelity”. The book is mostly focussed on word-level lexical semantics, but moves on towards semantic structures at paragraph level. Kathleen Callow’s (1974) companion volume shifts the focus to interpersonal and textual issues, based on a Hallidayan conception of language function (p.12) Two course-books at different levels of sophistication (Barnwell 1980; 1992)⁵ acknowledge dependence on

⁵ The first editions of these are 1974 and 1975 respectively.

“the theory and principles” of *TAPOT* and Beekman and Callow (1974). They both begin with the distinction of form and meaning and give considerable attention to lexical semantics, though Barnwell (1980) move on to the semantic structure of large units of text. More sophisticated yet, but still designed as a coursebook, is Larson (1998 – first edition 1984). Beginning at the same point, form and meaning, Larson interprets these in terms of surface (or grammatical) structure and deep (or semantic) structure where meaning resides. “Semantic structure is more nearly universal than grammatical structure.” (29) And it is semantic structure which is the main focus of this textbook, whether at a lexical level, where words are “bundles of meaning components” (the main focus, 59-295), or at the progressively higher levels of intersentential relationships (299-377) or whole texts (381-505). However, a movement towards the pragmatics of translation is evident in sections on the communication situation both at word and text level (143-53, 459-76). This “meaning-based” model for translation is more highly developed, particularly in the area of discourse structure, but represents once again the same theoretical bases as were laid out by Nida and Taber and the bibliography, even of the 1998 edition, shows relatively little interaction with the wider world of translation studies.

If *TAPOT* was the “bible” of UBS translation activity, then de Waard and Nida’s *From One Language to Another* (1986)⁶ was the authorised commentary and some attention must be given to how it approaches the theoretical foundations of translation.

It has been a matter of some debate as to whether the terms “dynamic equivalence”, as used *TAPOT*, and “functional equivalence”, as in *FOLTA*, are substantially the same or not. There is no doubt that in the minds of the authors of *FOLTA*, no distinction was intended:

The substitution of “functional equivalence” is not designed to suggest anything essentially different from what was earlier designated by the phrase “dynamic equivalence”.
(*FOLTA*, 7)

The change in terminology was largely driven by the desire to avoid the connotations mistakenly drawn from the term “dynamic”. De Waard and Nida viewed their new work as an elaboration of the earlier approach rather than its replacement. “Basically ‘dynamic equivalence’ has been defined in terms of functional equivalence.” (36) And it is certainly true that the description of what is required for dynamic equivalence in *TAPOT* is expressed in terms of three functions – the informative, expressive and imperative functions (*TAPOT* 24-28). From this point of view, *FOLTA* (25) merely extends or elaborates the number of functions to include the expressive, cognitive, interpersonal, informative, imperative, performative, emotive and aesthetic. In *FOLTA* (10f), as in *TAPOT*, the aim of translation is to produce the “closest natural equivalent” to the source text, and “to ascertain equivalence...one must focus upon the functions.” Yet the definitions themselves evidence a shift which might be described as a slight withdrawal to a more defensible position. Compare the following two quotes (where the emphasis is mine):

⁶ Henceforward *FOLTA*.

Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language *respond to* it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language.

(*TAPOT*, 24)

The translation process has been defined on the basis that the receptors of a translation should *comprehend* the translated text to such an extent that they can understand how the original receptors must have *understood* the original text.

(*FOLTA*, 36)

The change in the criterion from response to comprehension may well reflect a realisation that response is ill-defined and probably unmeasurable, whereas comprehension can be tested. Statham (2003, 2005) has argued that the difference between dynamic and functional equivalence runs deeper than authors allow and that the change in terminology reflects the shift to a social-scientific understanding of language as a cultural phenomenon.

Apart from this question of terminology, the presentation of the theoretical foundation of translation in *FOLTA* has both similarities and differences with that of *TAPOT*. The postulate of translatability is explained as resting on a number of presumed commonalities such as language universals, similarities of mental processes and similarities between cultures (42-44). The code model of communication is, if anything, even more central to the discussion. From the perspective of our more pragmatically and cognitively oriented times, it seems strange that a section about “The Nature of Communication” (11-19) should essentially be a description of how elements of the code model apply to translation. Certainly there are very helpful extensions: form is viewed as often significant for meaning, the “setting” (or “settings”) of an act of communication is seen as importantly contributing to its success or otherwise, and “codes” include non-linguistic as well as linguistic signs. Yet there is little here which is not found already, at least in embryo, in *TAPOT*. What gives the code model its renewed vigour in *FOLTA* is a new theory of meaning, one based on semiotics. This is indeed what distinguishes *FOLTA* from what had gone before. In defending their choice of the term “functional equivalence”, de Waard and Nida say

this text employs the expression ‘functional equivalence’, particularly since the twin bases of effective translation seem to be best represented in a sociosemiotic and sociolinguistic orientation, in which the focus is upon function.

(*FOLTA*, 36)

The book’s central chapter, entitled “Translating Means Translating Meaning” seeks to understand the process of translation in terms of sociosemiotic relationships between isomorphic sets of signs. This has the very positive function of embedding the text and its interpretation in the wider context of its social setting, and connecting the signs in the text with extra-textual signs:⁷

⁷ It is interesting to note that while earlier in the book the authors sought to distinguish exegesis from interpretation, and locate the translator’s activity firmly within exegesis, by focussing on the text as a sign, and a sign of signs, they here move definitively towards interpretation as the locus of translation.

a sociosemiotic approach to the meaning of verbal signs always involves the total communication of an event within the social context; in other words, a text cannot be isolated from its context...

a sociosemiotic approach to the process of translating is particularly useful in highlighting the fact that practically everything about a translation carries meaning, in the sense that anything that constitutes a sign of something is meaningful...from a sociosemiotic point of view meaning is not to be found merely in words or grammatical constructions. Signs have meaning whether on a lexical, grammatical, or rhetorical level, and whether paralinguistic or extralinguistic.

(FOLTA, 73, 76)

Yet meaning is still, as it was in *TAPOT*, containerised, located within the text itself, and accessible by a process of decoding, only now it is contained in signs rather than in words:

A verbal written text is essentially a record of the meaning indicated by a series of signs, but the text is never a perfect transcript. It is always devoid of certain features of intonation, voice quality, and as already noted, lacks very important elements of paralinguistic and extralinguistic features. *Decoding devices (principles of exegesis) should attempt to obtain from the text all the meaning that resides in it...*

(FOLTA, 65, emphasis mine)

The consequence of a semiotic understanding of meaning, in terms of an infinite regression of signs, is recognised by the authors, although it is doubtful that they realize how far this would be taken by others, as leading to an ultimate destabilisation of meaning and a dethroning of the text as the locus of meaning:⁸

This interpretive process of identifying the significance of a sign by means of other signs involves essentially a kind of infinite progression, or regression...Thus defining meaning is theoretically endless, although from a practical standpoint there is a point of diminishing returns. There can be no ultimate definitions and no absolute verbal formulations.

(FOLTA, 74)

The “point of diminishing returns” is of interest as it raises the question of how audiences interpret texts, given that they are signs which only have significance in terms of other signs. There are indications here that the authors are moving towards a more pragmatic understanding of the way meaning is constructed and the role of context in determining it, and also of locating the impact of context in the mind itself⁹:

The mind is constantly in the process of change as the result of new information, new paradigms for intellectual activity and new value systems. But for effective

⁸ A much more realistic view of the extreme possibilities of semiotics is to be found in one of Nida's recent writings: “Articles and books by Barthes and Derrida also interested me, but their existentialism and insistence on the complete independence of a document from its historical or original purpose seemed to conflict too severely with my concerns for understanding documents in relation to their cultural setting.” (Nida, 2004: 15)

⁹ All of these features, and especially the last, would be central to a Relevance Theoretic approach to communication and translation.

communication there must be some measure of partial isomorphism between communicating individuals or communities.... In order to discover the meaning of expressions which one has not heard before, it is almost always necessary to set up certain hypotheses based on possible isomorphic relations...

(*FOLTA*, 71-72)

Another feature which distinguishes *FOLTA* from earlier works is the attention given to rhetorical function, which is seen as a process of selection and arrangement of material to generate meaning at a level higher than that of grammar and not constrained by grammar-like rules (p.78 and the following two chapters). And it is only appropriate that this is where their analysis begins, and only then do they move to discuss meaning on a grammatical and finally lexical level. The rhetorical processes achieve many of the affective aims of a text as well as contributing its literary and aesthetic quality.

Seen against the backdrop of *TASOT* and *TAPOT*, *FOLTA* represents a significant movement of focus to larger levels of text and to the world outside of the text. Yet while the theory represented here grapples with the connection between text and context, it still locates meaning within the text, and does not represent a paradigm shift in translation theory within the Bible Society movement. The fundamental issues in *TAPOT* are still the fundamental issues in *FOLTA*. And the most innovative aspect of the book, an adoption of a semiotic understanding of meaning, was in fact to attract few followers, perhaps due to its radical questioning of the stability or even the originality of the source text. This is particularly true among those working in what was still seen as the core business of UBS translations, namely print media. On the other hand, it would be taken up enthusiastically by those working in “new media” or trans-media translations, and from there make its way back into the mainstream.

4. Dissent: Voices from outside UBS

While *TAPOT* continued to be the largely unchallenged framework for translation either explicitly (in UBS) or more implicitly (in SIL), there was a growing number of voices suggesting alternative conceptions of what a theory of translation should look like, with consequent implications for the practice of translators. These voices came from within academic translation studies and from other (mostly biblical) scholars interested in Bible translation. Increasingly from the mid 1980s onwards, these voices found receptive targets within UBS circles and stimulated a major rethinking of the theoretical basis of UBS translation work. In this section I want to briefly echo some of the voices from without, and in the next section trace the movements for change from within.

Developments within the field of translation studies which have provided alternative ways of thinking of translation have been noted by Naudé (2002) and Mojolo and Wendland (2003) who mention functionalist, descriptive, textlinguistic, relevance-theoretic, post-colonial, literalist and “foreignization versus domestication” approaches. Some of these have directly interacted with or reacted to Nida’s theoretical foundations. I would like here to note three critiques from other sources: from the worlds of biblical scholarship, literary criticism and translation studies. All three found Nida’s theory inadequate in ways which would subsequently preoccupy UBS scholars.

Nicholls (1986) expresses a certain appreciation for Nida's work and for the intrinsic merits and clarity of the TEV (now known as the GNT) as a common language translation.¹⁰ But his criticism is equally levelled at Nida's theoretical work, which at one point he describes as "incoherent" (45), and at the results as exemplified in the GNT. Interestingly it is not the Chomskian grounding of the theory that concerns him (44) but rather the criterion of the receptor's *response* as a measure of the success of the translation (44), especially to the extent that it results in cultural adaptation of the text in order to evoke a supposed similar response in the reader (50-51). Furthermore he suggests that Nida's translation theory is based on an inadequate theory of language (46). This would appear to be centred on the apparent disparagement of the significance of form for meaning, with the consequent priority of contextual over verbal concordance (45-47). This, he suggests, results in a loss of exegetical potential. He questions the need to resolve ambiguities by explication of assumptions, and also the need for restructuring the text in the target language for the sake of naturalness (47-48). He concludes:

..any theory of translation must draw on a theory of language. DE (Dynamic Equivalence) theory cannot provide the comprehensive account of the translation process that we seek, firstly because Nida's 'vehicular concept' of meaning does not do justice to the complexity of language and to the significance of form. Secondly his translation model defines equivalence in terms of the response of the receptors.

(Nicholls, 1986: 52)

Further

A written text such as the Bible has become decontextualized in the sense that we cannot expect helpful clues from the context of situation in the way we can with spoken messages. Nevertheless the structure and extent of the biblical corpus is such that the linguistic environment itself (co-text), provides a vast amount of historical and cultural information necessary for a successful understanding and translation of its message. A translation of the Bible.. should aim to retain as far as possible the exegetical potential of the source text.

(Nicholls, 1986:53)

Given the date of this critique, and the fact that Nichols could not have seen *FOLTA*, there is considerable merit in some of these criticisms, although it must be said that the possibility of avoiding reconstruction of text and ignoring implied meaning is usually advanced with respect to Indo-European languages in cultures which share a great deal with each other and with the biblical world that shaped them. However, not only would *FOLTA* reevaluate the importance of form for meaning, but many of these issues have been the focus of much research and writing by UBS personnel over the past 20 years. Thus it is passing strange, not to say deeply anachronistic, that the same set of criticisms, cast this time in the style of a "post-colonial" critique, but with the same patronising or derogatory reference to "Nida and his proteges", should be regurgitated in 2005 at a plenary session of the Society of Biblical Literature's International Meeting (Nicholls,

¹⁰ "With regard to the practice of translation there is no richer source of wisdom than the writings of Eugene Nida." (Nichols, 1986:51).

2005)! This is remarkable not only in that the author has clearly not informed himself of what has been happening in UBS translation circles in the last 20 years, but equally that the academy seems happy to accept this as a fair critique of UBS translation practice. Clearly there is a lot of communication still to be done!

The second critique I will mention comes from within the world of literary criticism. Prickett (1986: 4-8) contrasts Coleridge's tentative approach to the Scriptures, wary of how much his very thinking has already been shaped by them, with the Preface to the *Good News Bible*. Here he finds an overconfident assurance that an original meaning is to be found in the text, independent of cultural presuppositions, and that this meaning can readily be rendered into another language without doing damage to the language. Prickett's point of entry into the translation debate is the account of Elijah on Mt. Horeb, and the vexed issue of the translation of the Hebrew, *qol dammah daqah*, ("a still, small voice", 1 Kgs 19.12, KJV).

How far is it possible, in the words of the *Good News Bible*'s Preface, 'to use language that is natural, clear, simple, and unambiguous', when the Bible is *not about* things that are natural, clear, simple and unambiguous?

(Prickett 1986: 10)

Prickett's concerns are those not infrequently voiced by literary critics, that a translation theory which is predicated on translating meaning in preference to form (and his criticism is not restricted to UBS-sponsored translations), by losing the form of the text, sacrifices the only point of contact with the literary event which the text represents. What is really at issue is not the translation of this particular text, but a question of hermeneutics and epistemology. Prickett denies the possibility of accessing some supposed "meaning" or "historical fact" which is independent of the context of interpretation:

...any act of historical interpretation is conditioned not merely by the available evidence from the period in question, but also by the unconscious assumptions and the cultural context of the period when the interpretation is made...Perception is inseparable from interpretation; but interpretation without common ground in that which is to be interpreted is meaningless. The quest for historical fact has led to the place we might least expect: the ideological battleground of modern epistemology.

(Prickett, 1986: 21)

Nor will a retreat from a search for "historical facts" behind a text to the "intentions" of the author provide any relief. Prickett's critique here of G.B.Caird and Dennis Nineham moves from the security of Wimsatt's "Intentional Fallacy" onto the perilous ground of Kristeva and Barthes' intertextuality with the ultimate questioning of the very possibility of the "new" and the slipping away of meaning into a "welter of endless possibility" (27). Not that Prickett wants to stay very long on that ground, but it highlights the essential problem with which he is wrestling, which is at the interface of epistemology and translation:

Just as there is no longer an agreed hermeneutic procedure for interpreting the Old Testament, so, correspondingly, there is no universally applicable theory of translation. (29)

Prickett notes that theories of translation depend on theories of language and quotes Louis G. Kelly to the effect that linguists focus on the transmission of data, while hermeneutic theorists assume translation to be a recreation of text. Building on Dryden's famous analysis of translation types as metaphrase, paraphrase or imitation (with the last scarcely describable as translation), Prickett goes on to criticize Nida's theory as essentially that of paraphrase, where the supposed accessible meaning takes preference over the form, exegesis rather than hermeneutics. At heart, he says, is a problem with Nida's understanding of language as static. Innovation and change has, he justifiably argues, frequently been driven by translation, and nowhere more so than in the history of translation of the Bible. Nida's theory, he says, denies language its creative and innovative function: *the new may be said to occur when there is no adequate translation available.* (32) The Bible Society theory of translation seems to bring with it "pre-conditioning assumptions..of a popular 'scientific' and materialist culture ill-at-ease with the mysterious or ambiguous events that threaten to break the conventional categories of experience.. (35)

Thus by seeking to look behind the text, to a truly inaccessible place, Nida's theory loses sight of the very thing which contains the web of meaning, namely the text itself.

We are left with the paradox that an apparently 'transparent' approach to the Bible turns out to be, in reality, severely (if unconsciously) formalist and 'opaque', while an apparently 'opaque' technique seems to be the only way to restore a genuinely 'transparent' reading. To put it another way, it is those who look *through* the text who, disconcertingly, see least; those who would look at it and study the detailed patterning of its surface as an artifact, who discover most.

(Prickett, 1986: 35-36)

Once again we will see shortly that the issue of the literary quality of a bible translation has occupied the attention of some UBS researchers and practitioners since this critique was written. But the driving concern of Prickett is typical of literary scholars in the European world, where cultures and languages are related to each other and owe a common debt to the cultures and languages of antiquity. Prickett asserts that the concerns he has raised over the "still small voice" are in fact applicable to the whole of the biblical text:

So far from being an exception to a general rule, the stubborn oddities of metaphrase may turn out to be, on examination, paradigmatic of biblical language as a whole.

(Prickett, 1986: 33)

This, however, is never demonstrated and remains an unsupported assertion. It is hardly reasonable to critique a translation, and indeed a whole translation theory, by the way it treats one of the most obscure and paradoxical texts in the canon, and then to assert that the same applies to the bulk of more straightforward narrative and hortatory material. Nida's concern, and the concern of the Bible Society movement as a whole, is for the communication of the Bible's message in cultures and languages with little or no connection to the original context of Scripture. Having said this, the points that the subject matter of the Bible is often mysterious, and that its text should retain the power to intrude newness into a culture, are points well made.

For both Nichols and Prickett, the theory of translation is heavily dependent on a theory of language. In fact it could be said that everything beyond that is the practice of translation, rather than theory.

Venuti's relevance to our focal interest is guaranteed by two things. First, he grounds his translation theory on the concept of "foreignizing" translation developed by Schleiermacher (Venuti, 1995: 19-20, 116-118 and *passim*), whose relevance to Biblical translation is undoubted. But secondly he specifically picks out Nida's approach as a prime example of the opposite, "domesticating" tradition of translation.

It must be said, before anything else, that Venuti's motivation is openly political:

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

(Venuti, 1995: 20)

But just here he reveals a limitation of his relevance, because his primary concern is with translations *into English* and the global dominance of Anglo-American culture. What does this have to say to those translators who are translating *from* English into their own minority languages? His critique of Nida is largely centred on the results in terms of English translations of the Bible. Yet at the heart of it is a questioning of the priority of naturalness and communication within the target language culture (21-22) and of the criterion of equivalence of response. These are issues which, to one degree or another, have stimulated re-examination of the criteria for effective translation within the Bible Societies. While there are few who would advocate producing *unnatural* translations, the cultural and linguistic contexts of the source-languages of Hebrew and Greek have been given greater priority and weight. Ironically, although Venuti is fiercely critical of Nida's underlying motivation in terms of Christian mission (22-23), it is precisely here that his critique is of the greatest service because it has helped to refocus the presentation of the value systems reflected in the source documents, over against prevalent target-culture (most often non-Anglo-American) assumptions. By now it is obvious that the main issues presented by Venuti's critique are *ethical* rather than having to do with *translation theory*. Whether to produce foreignizing or domesticating translations is an ethical choice, as is the decision to produce a translation of the Bible at all. This too would become a growing area of interest and research.

5. Critical Development: Voices within UBS

We turn back the clock again now, to examine some of the developments within UBS which have modified, gone beyond, and ultimately challenged the dominance of Nida's theoretical framework for Bible translation.

Growing out of drawing-room meetings of a few North American scholars involved with Nida in Bible translation in the 1950s, the UBS Triennial Translation Workshops have

evolved into major international forums where UBS translation consultants from all continents and confessional communities debate the theory and practice of their craft with each other, and interact with scholars from outside the Bible translation world.¹¹ In the early meetings, Nida presented material from books on which he was working at the time and canvassed response and interaction to help finalize his drafts. Thus *TASOT* came out after meetings in the early 1960s and final drafts of *TAPOT* were discussed at the El Escorial (Spain) TTW in 1969, which was the first such gathering to include participants from Africa and Asia. TTWs in 1969 and the early 70s also saw work presented by Johannes Louw and William Smalley which extended the basic unit of translation, and the interest in translation theory, from the sentence up towards the entire discourse. In 1972 at Rüschlikon, Switzerland, Nida and Louw presented their work on biblical lexicography which would ultimately lead to their Greek-English Lexicon of the NT Based on Semantic Domains (Louw and Nida, 1988). However, tensions surfaced at some of these meetings between linguists and biblical scholars and these resulted in strong disagreement at the 1975 TTW which was again held in Rüschlikon. This was the first TTW where there was significant input from outside speakers. Hendrikus Boers presented on form criticism, but the focus of disagreement surrounded the presentations of Gerald Shepherd on canonical hermeneutics. The issue had little to do with translation, and much to do with theological differences between linguists (who were generally conservative biblically) and the more liberally-inclined biblical experts. It concerned the nature of what was being translated rather than how it should be (or was being) translated. While the rifts between linguists and biblical specialists within UBS appear to have been healed by the early 1980s, one unfortunate side-effect of the 1975 TTW was that a further 16 years would pass before outside speakers were again invited to make major presentations at these key UBS translation gatherings. And this, ironically, during a period of dramatic growth and development within the academic world of translation studies.

The 1978 TTW in Bangkok, Thailand, was significant for (at least) two reasons. Nida and Jan de Waard presented material that would later be published in *FOLTA*, in which the terminological (and, some would argue, substantive) change is made from “dynamic equivalence” to “functional equivalence” as the criterion for translation, based on a movement towards socio-semiotic theories of language.¹² And it was here that Nida announced that he was handing over leadership of UBS translation affairs to Heber Peacock.

The 1981 TTW under Peacock’s leadership, at Chania, Crete, was also a notable turning point. This appears to be the first occasion on which all participants were expected to read a paper and the first which saw the publication of a collection of the papers in a special edition of the *UBS Bulletin* entitled *Current Trends in Scripture Translation*. Peacock (1981) in his keynote paper provides a valuable “state-of-play” summary of the

¹¹ See Stine (2004: 92-94). I am indebted to the following colleagues for supplying information about TTWs: Daniel Arichea, David Clark, Phil Stine, Norm Mundhenk,...ADD MORE

¹² See elsewhere for discussion

role of theory in the practice of UBS translation, noting the significant shift towards discourse oriented translation practice, and the consequent difficulties in teaching:

It is an axiom of modern translation practice that meaning is more important than form. What is now needed is the next step that moves behind meaning to message. Perhaps it can even be expressed in the statement that message is more important than meaning...The translation process was once word-oriented....The move has now been made from sentence-oriented translation to discourse-oriented translation, but this requires a far more complicated approach...The rather straightforward rules of analysis, transfer, and restructuring have to be replaced with a far more intuitive (right-brained) grasping of the message in such a way that it may be transferred effectively to the receptor language.

(Peacock, 1981: 5-6)

This statement expresses qualitatively something similar to what Holmes (1988:83-84) had portrayed graphically as a necessary refinement or complication of the *TAPOT* three-stage model, to take into account the nature of texts as texts.¹³ It reflects a natural development from the process advocated in *TAPOT*.

Peacock's perspective was also forward looking. He called for UBS translation practice to attend more seriously to biblical exegesis, to the text itself, and to the reader. Under biblical exegesis he included not only detailed attention to "biblical backgrounds", but also the development of a theology of translation and attention to the theological message of the Bible:

The theology of translation needs to be something more than a philosophy about how translation is to be viewed and how it is to be done. There are a number of questions that need to be raised about the legitimacy of translation, the necessity of compromise and the limits thereof, and the creation of a message that is at least partially new because it impacts a new situation...A hermeneutical approach to translation will have to deal with a maze of problems related to understanding and interpretation.

(Peacock, 1981: 7)

The theology of translation, as one of its theoretical footings, has occupied many UBS writers since. But Peacock's expression of the problem touches, at least tangentially, on issues which were and would be faced more directly in the semiotic and deconstructionist approaches to translation. Pym(1993) would helpfully bring these ideas to bear on thinking about translation and its teaching, and suggested that in the idea of indeterminacy in translation, following Quine (1960), might be the only true theory of translation in the strict sense.¹⁴

In calling for more serious attention to be given to the text to be translated, Peacock intended not primarily textual criticism, but rather "understanding the meaning of the form of the text as it has been transmitted." (p. 7) This applies to both the discourse

¹³ Holmes paper "Describing Literary Translations: Models and Methods", was presented in Leuven in 1976. Peacock's formulation seems to be independant of this.

¹⁴ Pym, *Translation and Text Transfer*, quoted in Chesterman (1997:43).

structure of the whole text and to the “significance of a formal feature or literary device.” Once again, this is a direction which UBS scholars have subsequently explored in some detail, notably Ernst Wendland’s many publications on discourse and literary aspects of translation (1985, 1995, 2003, to note only one from each decade), and Simon Crisp’s (2002) Orthodox vision of iconic translation. The whole field of literary translation theories engages with the same or similar issues.

Peacock’s final call was to take the reader more seriously, saying “The day is gone when the bare text can be put in the hands of the reader if he is expected to understand its message. He needs help in bridging the temporal and cultural gap between the biblical period and today.” (p. 8) Here, in embryo, is the whole move towards increased sophistication of reader’s aids, towards study bibles of various kinds. Peacock suggests that the UBS should commit to producing Bibles “with adequate reader’s helps to make it possible for the full meaning of the text and its message to be made accessible for the reader.” As yet this still envisages the meaning as contained within the text, but it is also an anticipation of attention to text pragmatics, which was to become perhaps the dominant paradigm by the turn of the century and to provide the models and metaphors for newer translation theory.

These three directions of interest would shape (but not limit) much of what was to come from UBS scholars in the following 20 years. Other papers in the 1981 edition of *Current Trends* suggest that Peacock was reading signs already present as much as being prophetic. Newman (1981) attempts to describe what a theology of translation might or might not look like. Mundhenk (1981) and Sterk (1981) attend to the form and style of the source text respectively. And several contributors address the issue of study bible and reader’s helps (Ellingworth, Fry, Scanlin, Erickson, Fick, 1981). In anticipation of a major new direction in UBS interests, with significant theoretical implications, Koops (1981) explores the implications for translation of a shift in medium from print to audio.

The 1984 TTW at Bernh usser Forst, Germany, saw the position of Translation Research Coordinator pass from Peacock to Phil Stine, and the theological agenda forwarded through papers by Arichea(1985) and Mojola(1985). Thomas(1985) moved the hermeneutic question towards understanding how the translation and publication of scriptures should be guided by the hermeneutical methodologies of other faith communities, combining attention to theology with attention to the reader. I-Jin Loh (1985) and Ellingworth and Mills (1985) attended to study bibles from different perspectives – the first hermeneutic and the second through statistical research.

Under Stine’s leadership, participants at the 1987 TTW at Harper’s Ferry, W. Virginia, USA, were asked to focus their presentations on one of three areas: discourse studies, sociolinguistics and social approaches to exegesis. Stine felt that the lack of focus at previous TTWs limited the effectiveness of these meetings in raising the level of scholarship and competence among consultants.¹⁵ This time papers were published not only in a UBS Bulletin issue (Stine, 1987), but also in a UBS Monograph (Stine, 1988).

¹⁵ Philip Stine, personal communication, 2005.

The three focal areas continue a response to Peacock's call for attention to text and readers. A number of papers pursued areas already opened up in previous TTWs, such as the hermeneutical implications of study Bibles. In a presentation that was to become seminal and thus republished again later, Fry (1987) examined how the criterion of faithfulness and the task of "restructuring" translated text, both central concepts in *TAPOT*, would impact on the production of scriptures in media other than print (at this stage primarily thinking of audio tapes.) Of particular interest (at least to this writer!) are two papers which move discussion on from discourse pragmatics to the pragmatics of communication and reception. Dorn (1987) used reader response theory to modify Nida and Taber's communication model to take better account of the translator's role as intermediary. The aim, he suggested, is to allow the modern reader to "look over the shoulder" of the original reader, to "read someone else's mail". In order for this to happen not only the text itself, but its wider context must be communicated in such a way that "the translator has adequately regenerated the original biblical communication event so that what the 'real' author and reader were communicating and receiving can now be intercepted and understood by today's reader" (p. 116). Since many reader's will be far from "ideal readers", the translation itself should communicate as much of this total meaning as possible, but a wide array of readers' helps also contributes. Hope (1988) introduces "pragmatics" as a discipline, and though he spends most of his time on discourse pragmatics (and deixis in particular), he significantly moves on to discuss the role of "implicature" in communication, introducing not only Grice but also (at least in his bibliography) the work of Sperber and Wilson into the UBS translation field.¹⁶ We find in this paper too a very rare reference to the work of Austin and Searle.¹⁷

The next TTW was held in 1991, a year late, at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. Not only was this a significant move away from the American-European sphere, but outside speakers were invited to present major plenary series of lectures for the first time since 1975, and this was to become the pattern for subsequent TTWs. Phyllis Bird gave lectures in the field of Old Testament studies. And, most significantly in terms of our interests in this essay, Ernst-August Gutt, a member of SIL who had completed his PhD at University College, London, under Deirdre Wilson, presented a series of lectures which would be published under the title *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (Gutt, 1992). Here for the first time was a significantly new approach to the theory of translation. Up until this point, the developments in "translation theory" within UBS had consisted of taking elements of the multiple theoretical foundations of *TAPOT* and extending them in many directions. Focus on functional equivalence as a criterion for good translation had influenced work on the discourse structure of texts, on the point of view and social location of the readers and the information they needed to be given, on the move to translate for media other than print. At the same time issues concerning the nature and authority of the biblical text itself, and on the degree to which form and meaning are separable were pushing the theoretical framework of *TAPOT* towards the

¹⁶ It was first introduced into Bible translation worldwide by Gutt (1985, 1986a, 1986b).

¹⁷ It is an intriguing side-issue to note that Speech-Act theory, which significantly impacted biblical studies through the works of Thiselton, Vanhoozer and many others, has hardly been noticed in Bible translation literature.

limits of tolerance. But Gutt's "theoretical account of translation without a translation theory" (see Gutt 1990) was something quite different. Instead of constructing a theory of translation, Gutt viewed translation as a special type of communication, and thus used a particular cognitive theory of communication (Relevance Theory), in which coding and decoding is subordinate to an efficiency-determined process of inference, to provide a theoretical explanation for how translations of various kinds operate. The pursuit of relevance, Gutt claimed, underlies all of the communicative aspects (in both primary and secondary communication situations) which have been the focus of so much attention in the Bible translation field. Although many at the time could sense the potential usefulness of this approach, subsequent history has not seen this potential realised. The reasons for this require some attention and we will return to them after completing the present survey. For the moment it is sufficient to note some continuities and discontinuities in the development of UBS translation theory. Nida was a linguist and had always brought the insights of current linguistic study to bear on the task of translation. Gutt was doing precisely the same thing but the domain of the linguistic theory had shifted from text-based semantics to the pragmatics of inferential communication.¹⁸ And instead of using theoretical footings to advocate a particular methodology of translation, Gutt was using RT as an empirical and explanatory theory of communication to explain how translational communication worked. Furthermore, through Gutt, the influence of others working in the translation studies field began to be felt more keenly.¹⁹

The 1991 TTW was also notable for a very significant focus on translation for what was called "Audio Video Media" (and would subsequently be referred to as "New Media"). "Non-print media" had been the focus of a UBS consultation in Thailand in 1990 and a working group at Victoria Falls extended the theoretical and practical discussions. Stine (1991) demonstrated that theories of orality and narrative, which had become influential in biblical studies, had relevance also for translation; Boomershine (1991) noted that current shift to electronic media was only the latest in a series of media changes to have affected the Bible and its translation.²⁰

By 1994, Basil Rebera had taken over the leadership of UBS translation work, as Translation Services Coordinator, and organised the TTW in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Here the overtures to orality and narrative treatment of texts were developed in Joanna Dewey's plenary sessions on the Gospel of Mark. But most significant for our purposes,

¹⁸ In fact the move to RT as a basic explanatory framework is really a move beyond linguistics proper, as we shall see later.

¹⁹ Indexes of *The Bible Translator* from 1970-87 reveal a small trickle of reviews of the work of translation scholars from "the outside": Reiss (25/1, 1974) by Ellingworth; Orlinsky (27/3) by de Waard; Margot and House (32/3, 1981), Newmark (33/3, 1982) and Wilss (35/1, 1984) by Nida; Aryeh Newman (34/3, 1983) by de Waard. Katharina Reiss had two important contributions published in *The Bible Translator* (Reiss, 1976, 1983), the latter a paper delivered to the UBS Europe Regional Translation Committee in 1983.

²⁰ There was no issue, following this TTW, of a UBS Bulletin entitled *Current Trends in Scripture Translation*. Instead a number of the "Audio Video Media" papers and discussion documents were published in *UBS Bulletin* 160/161.

Basil Hatim and Ian Mason presented a series of lectures on translation theory and practice, essentially as published in Hatim and Mason (1990). Whereas Gutt came from within a partner Bible translation organisation, Hatim and Mason for the first time brought the perspective of “secular” professional translation studies into the spotlight. Given the vast amount of work that had taken place in Bible translation, and the pioneering role of Nida in thinking and publishing on translation theory, there was a natural tendency within UBS to wonder what such rank outsiders had to offer. Their approach was both empirically based, derived from examples of what translators had done in different circumstances, and textually focussed, allowing the nature of the text (“texture” and “turbulence”) to determine translation strategies. Such was the success of their presentations that they were invited back for the 1997 TTW in Merida, Mexico, where their lectures reflected their newer publication (Hatim and Mason, 1997), in which translation is still centred on textuality, but is seen as acting on an act of communication (in some ways echoing Gutt’s perspective, but in a very text-oriented world).

New Media were a major focus at both Chiang Mai 1994 and Merida 1997. At the former, there were previews of the ABS’s multi-media computer-based presentations of scriptural narratives which raised many issues relating to the ways in which either a dramatised or a post-structuralist visual depiction of biblical narrative can remain faithful to an original text narrative. Thomas (1994, a and b) furthered the discussion begun by Fry’s 1987 paper and presented a new proposal for criteria of faithfulness in multimedia translation. Boomershine (1994) developed his earlier ideas into a more systematic theory of “transmediatization”, relying considerably on Relevance Theory and on Gutt’s application of it to translation to provide his foundations.²¹ Merida, 1997, followed an American Bible Society symposium, held at the same location, on “Fidelity in New Media Translation” and there was considerable flow-on from the media symposium to TTW, including a presentation by Mona Baker. It is in publications arising from these symposia and the multi-media work of the ABS, addressing situations where the print-medium based textual theories no longer provide a helpful theoretical framework, that we find the most explicit application of semiotic theories to the realm of Bible translation. From here they in turn impact theoretical thinking in the more conventional print media as we shall see. Soukup (1999) discusses Carey’s (1989) distinction between models of communication theory: communication as transport, and as ritual, and adds to them communication as semiotic system and as conversation, a two-way interaction around a text. While *TAPOT* falls squarely in the first category, he classifies Gutt tentatively under the semiotic type (something I doubt Gutt would agree with!). Hodgson (1997) applies semiotics to the question of faithfulness of new-media translation and Stecconi (1999) adapts Pierce’s semiotic triangle to the double communication situation of translation; while at the same time demonstrating how semiotics questions the originality of the original and leads towards the primacy of translation.

The increasing strain on the Functional Equivalence model for translation is evident in several papers from Merida 1997. De Blois (1997) provides a useful summary of the

²¹ In my memory, Ted Hope was the only other person at Chiang Mai to present a paper which drew from Gutt’s 1991 presentations. See below.

movement from *TAPOT* to *FOLTA* and goes on to record a variety of attitudes from different social, national and cultural situations, toward the functional equivalence model, with the principles behind the new Dutch translation a specific focus. In general he finds a movement in many countries, especially those with a long an established Christian tradition, towards a “more intermediate position on the continuum between the extremes of functional equivalence and formal correspondence.” (p. 25) This is seen to be because the functional equivalence model tend to focus too exclusively on “ideational” meaning and to loose either “interpersonal” or “textual” meanings. Statham (1997) argues against Gentzler and in defence of Nida’s approach to translation. His main point is that Gentzler has misrepresented Nida and has failed to comprehend the richness and sensitivity of his approach to scripture. But from a translation-theoretic perspective, perhaps his most interesting point is to reject Gentzler’s linking of Nida’s “kernel” sentences to both his own (Nida’s) view of the universality of the christian message and to Chomsky’s linguistic universals and deep structure. The “kernel” sentences in Nida are, in Statham’s view, not so much a universal core of meaning as a device within a recommended process of translation.

“...when we examine Nida’s discussion of kernel sentences we find that these do not occur in a context of a bolstering of any theory about the universality of the biblical message but in the context merely of a pragmatic attempt to provide means by which translators could free themselves of the shackles of the forms of their own languages.”

(Statham, 1997: 35)

That Nida has not used kernels as support for a theological construct of the message is a point well made. Nevertheless, the same references make clear that it was precisely an appropriation of Chomskian generative grammar which provided the theoretical support for such a pragmatic device.

Hope’s (1997) paper is the most comprehensive attempt up to this point to actually provide a replacement (or major upgrade) for Nida’s model of the translation process. He begins by noting *TAPOT*’s dependence on generative grammar and the limitations imposed by treating sentences as the basic unit of translation, using Halliday’s text-oriented approach as his critical tool. His proposal is based on a new communication model which takes account of the significant role of context in creating meaning, on the contribution to meaning of multiple structures within the text, from discourse level through to rhetorical, and literary devices, and on inferential and semiotic processes taking place in communication. Significantly too, readers are no longer merely passive receptors, but contribute to the meaning-construction task. Text comprehension is a complex process by which a string of signs is interpreted through a grid of textual processing systems (a “magic ring of textual competence”), informed by context and the interpreters stored reservoir of knowledge. The success of a translation thus “depends on the way textual signs are used and the degree to which the significance of these signs is preserved or recreated.” (p. 14) This understanding of text-processing owes a lot to Relevance Theory, but Hope’s aim (n.1 p.19) is not the construction of “a model with the greatest theoretical validity, or with arguing alternative interpretations of data, but rather the model which makes the best practical use of a variety of theoretical insights in order to help translators do a better job.” It is pedagogical rather than empirical or explanatory.

Given that most of what had been published in UBS circles up to this point could be considered as a process of refinement, elaboration and development of ideas either explicit or just below the surface in *TAPOT* and *FOLTA*, it is perhaps not surprising that in 1999 “*TAPOT* was still considered by a significant number of people to be indicative of an organizationally supported, contemporary approach to Bible translation.” (Wilt, 2003: ix).²² And yet it is true that the theoretical framework had been stretched to breaking point and was no longer perceived as relevant by a significant number of the senior translation staff of the UBS. The dethroning of generative grammar and virtual abandonment of the search for universal deep-structures had left the fundamental concept of the separation of form and meaning on the syntactic level without theoretical grounding. Lexical semantics had not been supplanted but had been significantly de-emphasised by attention to pragmatic dimensions of meaning and significance. Communication theory had changed almost beyond recognition, taking account of the context of interpretation in terms of cultural conditioning, sociological and organisational forces, textual structure and inferential meaning-construction, to name but a few factors. As a result, arising out of a training seminar for new translation consultants in 1999, a team of senior consultants was commissioned to produce a book in which the theoretical and practical basis of UBS translation work at the turn of the 21st century could be captured, and which would function in something of the same role as *TAPOT* had for 30 years. Draft papers were read in plenary sessions at the 2000 TTW in Malaga, Spain, discussed by participants in small groups, and the result was the publication of *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* (Wilt, 2003). But before turning attention to this publication, it is worth noting some other voices to be heard at Malaga, as found in the 2002 edition of *Current Trends in Scripture Translation*.²³

De Blois and Mewe (2002) discussed the sensitive balance aimed for in the new Dutch translation (NBV) between form and function, foreignization and domestication, contextual and concordant meaning, and at the same time reflected the growing influence of *Skopos* theory in European translation thinking. Desnitsky (2002) and Crisp (2002), both writing from within the context of Russian Orthodox life and faith, question the relevance of functional equivalence translation, Desnitsky from the point of view of the relative sophistication of the audience and their history of Bible usage, and Crisp from the perspective of an Orthodox understanding of the iconic way in which language works to represent and make present the reality it stands for. Towner (2002) discusses Richard Hays approach to intertextual references as providing a nexus of meaning between texts and the challenges this provides to translation, while Pattemore (2002) discusses the same issue from a Relevance-Theoretic perspective, moving tentatively towards some practical implications of relevance theory for translation practice. Another paper written from an RT perspective, this time on a linguistic topic, was presented by Windedt (2000), but this did not appear in the *Current Trends* volume.

²² What is more surprising is that this should be found surprising!

²³ Since presenters from within UBS were dealing with the significant developments in translation theory and practice, the invited plenary speakers, Julian Schenker and Kwame Bediako, dealt with textual and theological issues, continuing the response within UBS to Peacock’s 1981 call.

The history of the development of *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, from its first inception in 1999 to publication, has been well described in Wilt (2002) and the book itself is the subject of a number of reviews in press (*BT* 56/3, 2005), so my reflections on it will be restricted to several key questions. What are the continuities and discontinuities between earlier UBS models and *Frames*? Or put another way, to what extent is it a replacement for *TAPOT* as a “flagship” for UBS translation practice? And is there a “theory of translation”, or perhaps multiple theories, to be found in it?

Firstly we should note, with Mojola and Wendland (2003), that the context of Bible translation and thinking about Bible translation, has changed dramatically. Over the decade of the 1990s, in fact since Gutt’s Victoria Falls presentation, scholars in the UBS translation community have read and interacted with an immense number of alternative viewpoints – theoretical and practical – on translation. Nothing like this existed in the 1960s. After a period of relative isolation from developments in secular translation studies, there has been a large and stimulating degree of catching-up to do.

Yet the fundamental approach to translation represented in *Frames* is remarkably similar in outline to that in *TAPOT*. It consists not of a unitary “theory of translation” in the sense of an empirical and explanatory generalisation of how translation happens, but rather of multiple theoretical footings in a number of disciplines, which coincide or grow out of the disciplines with which Nida and Taber worked. Yet within each discipline, and in their relationships to each other, there are very significant differences from the *TAPOT* approach. Now a theory of communication is more explicitly fundamental to all that happens in translation. This is outlined in Wilt’s (2003) article, which includes a much more detailed account of context and its structure, takes into account the semiotics of texts, and explicates the metaphor of “frames of reference” as a model for communication. That this is the subtitle of the book might suggest that it is a metaphor central to all the presentations, but this is only true of the first two chapters. Elsewhere it is rather incidental (one is tempted to say cosmetic). There is, as one would expect, discussion of the nature of meaning, but Bascom (2003) shifts the domain of discussion from a “language-internal” semantics to the cultural domain, informed both by Katan’s work on cultural frames, and by Lakoff and Johnson on the interaction of language and culture in the use of metaphor. In some ways this is a substitute for *TAPOT*’s componential analysis of meaning, and further is distinctly socio-cultural rather than socio-semiotic. Ross (2003) surveys linguistic trends over the recent past and demonstrates that no single perspective or theoretical description has a monopoly on usefulness to the translator. Ogden (2003) performs a similar task in the field of biblical studies. Finally, Wendland (2003) demonstrates the complexity of the literary structure of the biblical text in many genres. Pointing out the shortcomings of functional equivalence renderings as commonly understood, he does not yet dispense with the idea of functional equivalence, but refines it, calling for “literary functional equivalence” (or LiFE) translations.

All of this is driven by a very similar motivation to that which guided the earlier books on translation within UBS – the desire that Bible translators should do the best possible job

in their role of mediating the ancient text in new and different contexts, and allowing its message to be heard. There is still a sense running through the entire book, even when the tenor is descriptive rather than hortatory, that “this is what you *should* do” or “this is something you *should* attend to” as you go about your task of translation or supervising translation. There is very little, if anything, that falls into the category of a descriptive or explanatory theory of what happens when translators translate.

There is, at least in embryo, a model of the translation process (Wilt, 2003:79. See Figure 10.1). But unlike *TAPOT*, even the most pervasive model of communication in action, provided by the frame metaphor, is not clearly worked out in terms of the practicalities of doing and teaching translation (despite the pointers offered in the appendices). It should be said that this is clearly recognised by the authors and editor, and that the pedagogical and practical functions will be met by another publication which is close to completion.

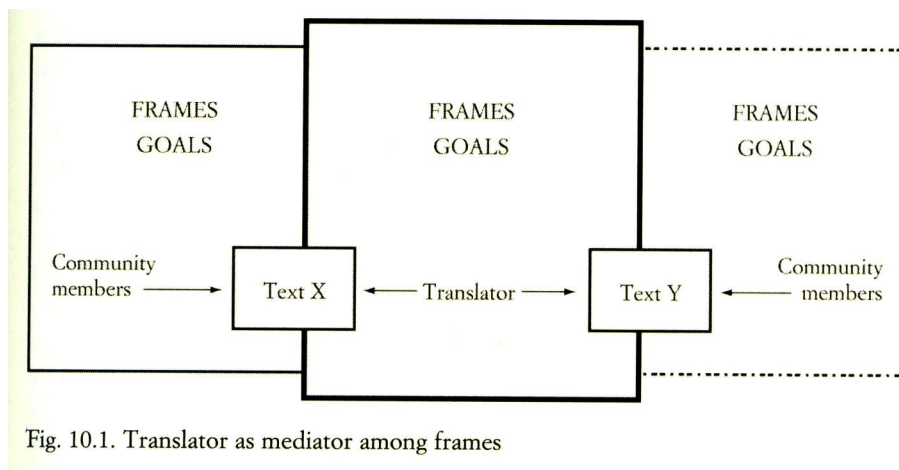


Fig. 10.1. Translator as mediator among frames

In parallel with the global workshops organised by UBS, the American Bible Society has actively promoted writing and research on translation theory, now focussed by its Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship. We have already noted the symposia on “New Media” translation in 1995 And 1997. In 2001 the ABS hosted the International Conference on Similarity and Translation, the proceedings of which are published in Arduini and Hodgson (2004).. This was highly significant in bringing together translation scholarship from UBS (Nida, Sterk, Koops, Mojola, Wendland, Hodgson), from SIL (Gutt, Sim, Boswell) and from academic translation studies (Nord, Chesterman, Steconi, Arduini to name a few). This programme of cross-fertilization is continued through cooperation with the Louvain University-based Center for Translation, Cultures, and Communication (CETRA), most notably through ABS and UBS participation in its annual Translation Studies seminars in Misano Adriatico, Italy. Another example of this sort of dialogue is the symposium hosted by the Bible Society of South Africa in 2001, with papers published in Naudé and van der Merwe (2002). The present volume is a further evidence of today’s climate of collaborative academic inquiry in the area of translation research.

To conclude this survey of translation theory in UBS through the lens of Triennial Translation Workshops, I need to make some mention of the 2003 meeting in Iguassu Falls, Brazil. Here the outside speakers were Elsa Tamez, on theology, and Anthony

Pym who presented a series of lectures on the ethics of translation, focussed around key questions: What should we translate? For whom should we translate? How should we translate? Why should we translate? Here translation is seen as, in itself a deliberative, morally ambivalent social activity, but Pym's underlying theme is that translators and interpreters are the mediators, the peacemakers, the bridgebuilders of a new globalised society. It is interesting to note how closely Pym's concerns here mirror those which have been expressed slightly differently in UBS circles since Peacock, in dealing with the theology of translation. Pym presents, in effect, a secular theology of translation. At the same time many of the questions are also those asked by scholars involved in the functionalist or *skopostheorie* school (Nord, 1997), which from the late 90s on has been significantly influential among UBS-related translators, especially in the European (Dutch) and South African fields. Van der Merwe (2003) presented a paper at Iguassu Falls outlining a research programme into different types of Afrikaans translations which was guided by assumptions derived largely from Nord's writings. But van der Merwe has also been a strong supporter of Gutt's work and this is also reflected in his paper. Among other presentations at Iguassu Falls Harriet Hill (2003) of SIL described empirically-based support for Gutt's application of RT to translation.

6. Relevance Theory, proposals and reactions: a case of "honourable bigotry"?

In this essay we have traced the development of the theory undergirding the practice of translation in UBS circles, from Nida through to *Frames of Reference* and beyond. What we have seen could, in general, be described as incremental or non-catastrophic change, the development and embellishment of ideas already present, at least in embryo, in Nida's early work. This is so much the case that although *Frames* claims in some sense to present a new theoretical basis for translation, it structurally resembles Nida's theory to a very considerable degree.²⁴ I would like here to examine briefly the way in which Relevance Theory has been presented as a candidate for a paradigmatic shift in translation theory, and the progress or lack of progress it has made in the face of a more evolutionary development. I must record at the outset that I am a strong proponent of RT's account of human communication, and of its consequent relevance to both interpretation and translation. However, in this section my interest is in the history of reception of RT (and in particular Gutt's application to translation) *as theory* within UBS, rather than in advocating its validity.

At least on the surface, the areas in which Gutt's relevance-theoretic explanation of translation diverges from Nida's treatment are very similar to those of Wilt and his colleagues: principally the abandonment of a Chomskian search for deep structures as a point of translational equivalence (on a theoretic or practical level), and the shift in emphasis from lexical semantics to highly context-sensitive pragmatics. But at a more fundamental level, it is the RT understanding of the way communication functions which

²⁴ Wilt (2002b: 141) comments: "In a very general sense, it is a continuation of the tradition popularised by Nida." He goes on to list such areas of similarity as its interdisciplinary approach, its view of translation as communication, continually looking for advances in scholarship for understanding translation, based on a reverence for the Scriptures, and having the goal of contributing to all people's appreciation of the scriptures. The main difference he sees is in the theory of communication being used.

presents a radical challenge to what has gone before. I will here examine in a little more detail Gutt's presentation at TTW 1991, published in Gutt (1992), rather than his longer and more systematic work (1991, 2000) because this is precisely the point of impact of his theory on UBS translation thinking and the starting point for the history that follows.

Gutt's Victoria Falls lectures began innocuously enough with a description of the inferential nature of human communication and the suggestion that this will have implications both for how we understand the meaning of the source texts, and the techniques we use to communicate them to new audiences (Gutt, 1992: 7-20). But in filling out these implications, he effectively removed or replaced many of the theoretical foundations of Nida's translation. From the very beginning the inadequacy of the code model of communication, even as developed within semiotics, is highlighted. And the next pillar to go is the postulate of translatability, itself dependent on a Chomskian view of the world of language. Instead, Relevance Theory suggests a "condition of communicability" which is more relevant and fundamental than any postulate of effability or translatability.

...our inferential account of communication entails a *condition of communicability*: An intended interpretation is recoverable not in just any context, but *only in a context where the requirements of optimal processing are fulfilled*, that is, where there are adequate contextual effects without unnecessary processing effort....In fact, successful communication requires that the utterance be processed in the context envisaged by the communicator"

(Gutt, 1992: 28)

This imposes certain *theoretical* limits on translation in ways which are extremely uncomfortable to Bible translators:

In Third world countries, where the knowledge background of many readers is much more restricted, we usually take the line that essentially all that people need is a good translation of the biblical text. This strange state of affairs seems to have arisen from an inadequate understanding of the natural constraints to which communication is subject. This, in turn, leads to quite unrealistic expectations as to what a translation can achieve...

(Gutt, 1992: 32)

...the assumption often made in translation circles that any message can be communicated to any audience regardless of their background knowledge seems untenable.

(Gutt, 1992: 35)

Gutt next examines the idea of equivalence in translation. Equivalence as a criterion of successful translation is at the heart of Nida's "dynamic equivalence" and/or "functional equivalence", however you wish to relate the two terms. Gutt notes the general pessimism in linguistic circles about the possibility of defining a notion of equivalence which can be of use to a general theory of translation. Wilss in particular suggests that only in text-type-related or even single-text-oriented (and we might add, language-pair specific) theories of translation may be it possible to define equivalence, and Gutt demonstrates the logical contradiction this leads to, a denial of the very possibility of theory (p.36). RT, however, by its definition of interpretive use of language, provides the

possibility of a notion of faithfulness, which is not specific to translation but can be applied to it: “in interpretive use the principle of relevance does, in effect, come across as a *presumption of faithfulness*”. Here is the most radical point of Gutt’s proposals, namely that no particular theory of translation is necessary, only an application of more general principles that guide communication to the specific situation of “interlingual interpretive use.”

In one way, it seems that this is, in fact, all we need to say about translation; for we have reexplained how a text in one language can be interpretively represented by a text in another language and we have explained how it will be interpreted... These conditions seem to provide exactly the guidance that translators and translation theorists have been looking for. They determine *in what respects* the translation should resemble the original: only in those respects that can be expected to make it adequately relevant to the receptor-language audience. They determine also that the translation should be clear and natural in the sense that it should not be unnecessarily difficult to understand.

(Gutt, 1992: 42)

Gutt proceeds to demonstrate how successfully RT handles non-literal language, because it presumes that literalness is the exception rather than the rule. RT’s success at describing the way in which figurative language works within a language has been well demonstrated in the works of Sperber and Wilson and Pilkington. This provides both good news and bad news for the translator:

The good news is that it (RT) offers a sharp tool for getting a better understanding of the original text and also for the analysis of translation problems. The bad news is that it shows us that translation is probably even more challenging in some respects than we had previously assumed. The richness of nonliteral meaning and its strong dependence on a shared cognitive environment may bring home to us with new clarity the question, How can the translator get this meaning across to an audience of another culture?

(Gutt, 1992: 60)

But perhaps the single most seminal suggestion in this lecture series is the comparison of the task of translation with that of reporting the speech of another person, which offers the choice of direct or indirect quotation. Translation is in some ways like an interlingual speech quotation. But the option of a true direct quote is no longer available because of the intrinsic limits of interlingual communication, and every act of translation involves interpretation – “meaning based translation is, in fact, the only kind of translation possible” (65). Yet by analogy with direct quotation it is possible to define a direct translation as “*one that presumes to interpretively resemble the original completely (in the context envisaged for the original.*” (66) The alternative, indirect translation, attempts to produce a resemblance of the original when understood in the *new* context. Here, in short, is both a defence of and a challenge to the theory behind “meaning-based” translation. On the one hand, this is the only possible kind of translation. But on the other hand, at least for the direct translation option, the constraints implied by the condition of understanding within the original context, significantly limit the freedom to expand and distort the text. Yet at the same time this also explains clearly why literary translation experts, particularly those that operate within the Indo-European language family and

Western cultural context, often fail to understand the problems of translation faced by those working outside this domain. They work entirely in a world in which the target languages allow construction of stimuli which interpretively resemble the original very closely – because of the structure of the language and the cultural context.

Gutt concludes with a series of sixteen “key statements” about successful communication in translation (67-74), setting translation as a phenomenon to be understood within the parameters of a general theory of communication. They reinforce the primary importance of context, and specifically the new audience’s access to the original context. The task of bridging the contextual gaps is one which must be tackled holistically: the ultimate objectives of Scripture translation cannot be achieved by translated texts alone. And note especially the following:

Translators should have a firm grasp of hitherto neglected aspects of meaning. In particular, they should understand that there are important differences between expressing and implicating information, between strong and weak communication. They should understand the importance of open-endedness in communication, especially for figurative language and poetic effects, and the danger of limitation and distortion that can arise from explication.

(Gutt, 1992: 72)

I have quoted this last at some length for two reasons. Firstly, it responds very precisely to the criticisms levelled at Bible translation theory by literary scholars (as we have seen in the case of Prickett, and similarly Nicholls). But secondly it will be important to our assessment of the some of the criticism levelled at Gutt from within the UBS community.

It is worth noting here that RT itself arose as a cooperative venture between a linguist (Wilson) and a cognitive sociologist (Sperber), and from the beginning has never been a purely linguistic venture. It functions in many ways as a node of theory, similar to those proposed by Arduini, drawing from and feeding back into areas such as linguistics, communication theory, cognitive psychology, hermeneutics, mathematical modelling and many many more. As such it does not function within Gutt’s proposal as a precise substitute for either the code model of communication or Chomskian linguistics within Nida’s scheme. This perhaps contributes to the difficulty there has been in accomodating it within other schemes.

Gutt’s RT framework, based around a principle of faithfulness by maximum interpretive resemblance within the intended context, does seem to cover all the criteria normally applied as tests of success in Bible translation, whether described as “accuracy, clarity, naturalness,” or “closest natural equivalent” or faithfulness to both source text and receptor language and context. It is reductionist and simplistic only at a theoretical or ontological level. Translation is an instance of communication (second order communication) and therefore it obeys the laws of communication. Yet even on this level, “reductionist” is a rather misleading label, as Gutt has recently pointed out, since the domain of RT itself is the intrinsic and complex functioning of the human mind.²⁵

²⁵ Gutt, personal communication, 2005: “RT itself is actually an enormously complex and sophisticated theoretical framework...reflecting the complexity of the human mind and its endowment of ostensive-inferential communication. In this respect the term 'reduction' in the sense of 'simplification' can

But at both an explanatory level (in terms of the role of context and the implicatures of poetic language) and on a prescriptive level (in terms of the “key statement”) it is anything but simplistic and his programme calls for an immense amount of work – both for theorists in filling the details of how relevance guides language use (and this is being done in the academy) and for translators in taking into account all the richness of the source language communication event. In fact it seeks to both explain the functions of language and guide the activity of the translator along all of the literary, cultural, iconic, theological paths so eloquently explicated by some of the detractors of RT!

RT seems to have been criticised within SIL and UBS for rather different reasons. Within SIL largely because it was seen as undermining the strategies for meaning-based translation so painstakingly worked out and applied in hundreds if not thousands of translation projects around the world (reflected perhaps by his dethroning of the term “meaning-based”). Gutt’s advocacy of “Direct Translation” was seen as a call to return to “literal translation”. This is not so – on two levels. Firstly Direct translation is not the same thing as literal translation. In fact, ironically, it is based on an underlying commitment to meaning-based translation. And secondly Gutt is not prescriptive in the sense of saying “this is how you must do it.” Even the prescriptive edge to the “key statements” is really advice that “if you do it this way, these will be the consequences” or “if you want to achieve this result, you will need to take into account the following items.” And these predictions have been confirmed empirically in the work of Ralph and Harriet Hill (2003, a, b). Perhaps underlying the SIL opposition, though, is Gutt’s dismantling of the dream that a translation by itself in a totally different culture than the original, can effectively and faithfully communicate the Christian message. This he has done, and this is something that SIL may not like but UBS should have no problem with at all!!

UBS opposition seems to have been largely due to a misunderstanding of the nature of the absolute and reductionist claims for RT in Gutt’s formulation. These are seen as negating all the careful work that has been done, for example, by Wendland and Wilt in describing Literary Functional Equivalent translations. This is a misapprehension, and a careful reading of either Gutt’s TTW lectures or his book shows that he is affirming the need to examine the source text in precisely the detailed way Wendland, for example, exemplifies. What he does say is that since the search for optimal relevance undergirds all communication, the way in which literary and stylistic effects function will be most clearly understood if this is taken into account both on the source text and target text side. It is in this area of nonliteral language that RT is perhaps the most powerful.

The beginning of my own involvement with UBS coincided with my first reading of Gutt’s work following the Victoria Falls presentation in 1991. It was something of a surprise to me therefore, to find at the 1994 meeting in Chiang Mai so little uptake of what appeared to me to be stimulating and challenging ideas. Only two papers, in my memory, referred to it in any way – one being Boomershine’s (1994) work on

be very misleading. The reductionist approach of RT reveals far greater complexities than proprietary translation theories.”

transmediatization already mentioned, and another a brief paper by Ted Hope (1994). It was as though a curtain of silence was drawn over RT - and this despite the fact that most of the trenchant criticisms of Gutt from UBS staff were yet to be published. Perhaps it was surprising for me precisely because most of my detailed study of Nida's theory and practice had occurred *after* being exposed to Gutt. It is from my present perspective, less surprising, and suggests that the use of RT as an explanatory framework for translation represents a paradigm shift of the sort which is notoriously difficult and slow to be accepted.

Criticism of RT from within UBS was given its most eloquent voice by Wendland (1996 a and b, 1997). I have explored this debate elsewhere (Pattemore, 2003: 29-37), as has van Grootheest (1996) in more detail. Criticism was partly aimed at Gutt's application of RT to translation but more particularly at the underpinnings of RT itself. This reflects a sound recognition that it is not specifically the treatment of translation but the understanding of the dynamics of human communication in terms of Relevance Theory which is fundamental to Gutt's approach. I have suggested that I believe the criticism to be unwarranted and that the areas of common ground between Wendland's detailed textual work and what is proposed by Gutt are much more extensive than Wendland believed. Further, this is so precisely because RT provides an explanatory and not a descriptive or pedagogical account of translation, and thus underwrites the very nuanced and detailed way in which Wendland handles literary translation.

Wilt's approach to Gutt's work has been ambiguous, but primarily reactive against what appeared to be a reductionist approach, or at least one which minimised the contributions of detailed textual study. In Wilt (2002a) he writes:

However, his reductionist approach and far-reaching claims, coupled with the lack of readily available materials illustrating how relevance theory may be applied in the crucial area of training, have resulted in wheat being thrown out with chaff. Gutt's and others' work focusing on inside-the-head aspects of translation and work such as that of our group's, giving considerably more attention to outside-the-head aspects of Bible translation, complement, rather than compete against, each other.

(Wilt, 2002a: 14-15)

We have already to some extent discussed the objection to the "reductionist" approach. The second comment is highly ironic, given that the identical criticism has been levelled at *Frames of Reference*. In both cases the answer is simply a question of time. And the final remark illustrates a misunderstanding of how RT handles context. Since interpretation takes place "inside-the-head", nothing that is "outside-the-head" can influence it until it has itself first been internalised (though not necessarily self-consciously). This is precisely RT's concept of context as subset of the cognitive environment. Wilt's approach to communication theory in *Frames* has much in common in terms of its outworking with an RT approach, and his attitude is more irenic

His (2000) expansion should be required reading for all Bible translation consultants....I view our work as complementing, rather than competing against Gutt's and that of others who are exploring applications of relevant theory to translation.

(Wilt, 2003: 44 n. 21)

But while he works with a pragmatic communication theory, and the “frames” he describes work in some ways similarly to a “mutual cognitive environment” in RT, they are externally and arbitrarily constructed and overlapping frames often stand in competition with each other. RT attempts to explain what is happening in the human communication process even below this level.

Others within the wider sphere of UBS appreciated and worked with Gutt’s ideas in several directions. Dave van Grootheest (1996) in an unpublished thesis which deserves much more attention than it has received, summarized the tenets of RT and Gutt’s (1991) application to translation, and then spends considerable time analysing Wendland’s (1996b) objections. While appreciating the seriousness of Wendland’s concerns, he showed by a careful examination of the terminology used that the protagonists have largely been talking past each other, certainly in terms of “cognitive processes”, RT’s ability to handle “connotative”, vague or poetic effects, and the very effort/effect analysis proposed by RT. Furthermore he suggested that Wendland had failed to appreciate the status or the level at which RT operates as a theory, and that his apparently generous suggestion of incorporating insights from RT into a broader framework of translation missed the point that RT, if it is indeed a fundamental explanation of human communication and cognition, underwrites all the other alternative or complementary frameworks he proposes. Van Grootheest does far more than simply adjudicate the discussion between Gutt and Wendland. He goes on to consider carefully to what extent Gutt’s proposals for explaining translation under RT succeed. There is a very cogent assessment of the actual similarity between direct quotation and direct translation. He notes that whereas in Gutt (1991) there is no preference expressed for direct as against indirect translation, there is in Gutt (1992). On the positive side he demonstrates that Gutt’s approach is not really a retreat into “literal” translation but that in fact it requires an essentially functional equivalent approach to the translated text, since the requirement of “direct translation” is not that that the chosen stimulus should resemble the source stimulus in its linguistic properties, but that it should have complete interpretive resemblance, should produce the same cognitive effects when interpreted within the same context. On the other hand Gutt’s “direct translation” remains conservative about how much of the context should or can be incorporated into the text itself. These are both positions which sit well with UBS approaches to translation. Van Grootheest’s caveats or hesitations about the RT account of *Bible* translation involve firstly a caution about how much of the Bible actually consists of tokens of ostensive communication (and therefore falls within the domain of RT) and secondly a suspicion that rigorously defined direct translation may not actually be possible. The second of these is a valid concern, although it is my opinion that Gutt sees direct translation as the limiting case in a continuum. But the first of Van Grootheest’s concerns is more questionable, and depends on a rather unfortunate limitation of “ostensive communication” to “normal communication”, when in fact the conditions described by RT for “ostensive communication” can be seen to apply to the whole of the canon, at least at some level. But there is a passage in Van Grootheest’s concluding section which deserves quoting at some length:

When Gutt discusses a translation principle, and shows how it can be explained as an application of the principle of relevance, he is inclined to say that this translation principle is unnecessary. Considering that his stated aim is theoretical explanation,

this is understandable and legitimate. As far as I can see, such statements should not be understood as commenting on, for instance, the use of such translation principles in the practice of translation; nevertheless, it would seem that this is exactly how these statements have been understood by those who have so sharply criticized them. They could have been more careful in assessing of the scope of these statements; conversely, one may say that Gutt could have been more careful in explaining what he meant by such statements...

(Van Grootheest, 1996: 91)

This is one of the main points of contention and Van Grootheest has done well to state it so plainly. Once again it highlights that the issue is one of the level at which RT provides a theoretical account. According to Gutt, it explains all the surface level intuitive and experience-based translation principles, thus rendering them unnecessary *on the level of theory which it addresses*, but not by any means therefore to be ignored or treated as superfluous.

My own work (Pattemore 2002, 2003 a and b, 2004) has been focussed largely on the source text side – showing how adopting an RT understanding of the communication taking place behind a biblical text can refine and sharpen the tools used for understanding the biblical text within its original context of interpretation, which Gutt stated was an essential precondition for faithful translation. Assuming that optimal relevance was a principle undergirding the communication function of the texts in their original settings allows for a more precise definition of relevant context and a weighing of the likely contextual effects achieved by assuming particular contexts of interpretation. Again, RT *explains* the way in which the original communication worked, and therefore can be expected to explain why certain principles of exegesis and interpretation are valid (and some invalid). Therefore I have not sought to set up RT-based interpretation as an alternative, or even as a complement to other exegetical methods, but rather as underwriting them, allowing the interpreter to make the best use of all valid methodologies, by sharpening their focus. A frequent response to this work has been that the interpretation I arrive at is convincing and helpful, but that it could have been arrived at without recourse to RT. This is precisely what one would expect if RT describes is the underlying pathway of communication.

In South Africa the ideas of Gutt have been taken up and put to positive use in circles closely associated with the Bible Society. Work by Christo van der Merwe (2003) stands out as integrating Gutt's criteria for direct translation within a translation project whose boundaries are defined in a functionalist way along the lines of Christiane Nord.

If relevance theory is indeed a true explanation of the mechanism of human communication and cognition, then Gutt's "reductionist approach and far reaching claims" are neither outrageous nor even unreasonable. Indeed they are almost trivially true. It is the claim that all human communication (at least of the ostensive inferential type) is governed by the search for optimal relevance that is the outrageous claim. That is, unless it is supported by empirical evidence, in which case it is no more outrageous than any universal scientific claim, such as the claim that every body in the universe attracts every other body with a force that decreases as the square of the distance between

them. Unlikely, perhaps - but scientifically, empirically defensible. On the other hand, if predictions based on a relevance-theoretic account of translation are shown, empirically, to be false, then the question remains as to whether the *account* is wrong, or whether the *theory* underlying it is wrong. Much work remains to be done.

In short, within the UBS, RT has not succeeded, up to this point, in having its claims accepted except by a small minority. We have seen that this is partly due to a confusion of terminology, partly to a misunderstanding of the level at which RT's claims most radically impact. Understanding translation within an RT framework is in fact a paradigm shift, because RT claims to underwrite all human communication processes and therefore this is something new. And thus this approach appears to be facing the same struggle that many scientific paradigm shifts have in the past. Even since a number of mediators (such as van Grootheest and myself) have attempted to clear up misunderstanding, and despite irenic and accomodating comments from Wilt, Wendland and others, there has truly been little evidence of a meeting of the ways, with the exception of the work mentioned above in South Africa. More than two centuries ago William Wordsworth said:

“...all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honourable bigotry for the objects which have long continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have become accustomed to be pleased.”

(Wordsworth, 1992: 170)²⁶

Perhaps it is not too much to suggest that such “honourable bigotry”, or (respectable) aesthetic conservatism has as much to do with the issue as anything.

7. Conclusion: Framing Nida

This survey of the history of translation theory within the UBS has attempted to be both descriptive and, to a lesser extent, analytic. We have traced the development from the long period when Nida *was* the framework within which UBS translation thinking took place, to the present where Nida's work continues to exercise an influence but as a *part of* the framework and is itself both represented (framed in a good sense) and misrepresented (framed in the less positive sense). During the 1970s and 1980s theoretical interests of UBS scholars were focussed on extending and building on the foundations provided by *TAPOT*, in areas such as discourse and literary analysis, socio-linguistics and pragmatics, but to some extent insulated from the rapidly emerging academic translation studies. This all changed from 1991 onwards and the past 15 years have seen two separate movements. Firstly the critiques of Nida's work from outside the UBS have had increasing influence and there has been the integration of academic translation theories from the likes of Hatim and Mason, Nord, Chesterman and Pym and the sociology of

²⁶ Appropriately, I owe this gem to another RT proponent, Ian McKenzie (2002), who applies the term “honourable bigotry” to the relationship between classical accounts of literature (including pragmatic ones such as RT) and romantic (deconstructionist) accounts. He proceeds to (in my view) cogently demonstrate the superiority of RT over the deconstructionism of Paul de Man.

Katan, Lakoff and Johnson. The outcome has been a theoretical framework for the ongoing translational activity of UBS based on a pragmatic communication model, a context-sensitive literary approach to text and a functionalist view of the parameters of translation. Yet in its structure, and indeed in some of the particulars, this framework closely resembles Nida's and can be seen as the result of a non-catastrophic process of change. The second movement, which has been both more radical and, to date, less successful, is the attempt to provide a fundamentally different paradigm for translation based on a Relevance-Theoretic understanding of the psychology of communication. That this can form the basis of a translation theory which includes the literary and sociological sensitivities of the first approach has been demonstrated and championed by a few. That for most it has not done so is largely the result of a failure of communication. UBS translation scholarship is in robust shape and actively engaging significant issues both internal and externally, and this is due in no small measure to the precedent established by Eugene Nida, and forms a fitting frame for the heritage he has entrusted to us.