

REVIEW

Wendland, Ernst. *Contextual Frames of Reference in Translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2008. 344 pages. Paperback. £22.50. ISBN: 978-1-905763-02-3.

Ernst Wendland has written yet another book. It is meant to be a workbook to accompany the more theoretical volume to which he (and this reviewer) contributed: *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* (2004). As is usual for him, Wendland's presentation is encyclopedic in scope and fair and balanced in tone. It remains both theoretically flexible and practically oriented. There is little if anything that has been left out or ignored. The book includes substantive contributions from other students of (mostly Bible) translation as well. Among these are Robert Bascom, Roger Omanson, Donald Slager, and especially Lourens de Vries, who also wrote the Foreword to the book.

Wendland begins with a chapter on cognitive frames, which he sees as encompassing (like onion layers, each presented in succeeding chapters) sociocultural, organizational, situational, textual, and lexical frames. In each chapter, the author has presented a rich array of material from various sources. But more importantly for this project, he has given ample space to practical exercises which provoke the user into engaging the text in a dialog about the main ideas presented. After all of this, Wendland goes on to present two case studies from the book of Revelation, applying them to a present-day audience (Chewa). He even manages to include chapters on translation evaluation and translator training, and an appendix on primary orality. One is tempted to say that Wendland has tried to put too much in this book, but then has to admit that all of it is interesting and that somehow the author manages to relate it all in such a way that it seems to fit together well.

There is one quibble. It is a certainty that if the issue had been brought to his attention in time, Wendland would have dealt with it in some (likely rather extensive) way. Furthermore, this failing is not one of the author's own research, but rather a failing of the major part of the field(s) of cognitive science in general. And of course one must remember that this critique is from the perspective of this reviewer.

The problem is this: Cognitive science for the most part has not taken account of how dynamic, even ephemeral, frames of reference are and why they are that way. Thus frames are often presented as static collections of pre-fabricated mental models available for off-the-shelf use. The main exceptions to this kind of thinking are cognitive sociologists and anthropologists. These students of human behavior present frames of reference as a part of an ever-changing dynamic of communication at various levels, or as they might put it, the dynamic structure of social interaction.

Once frames (or roles, or whatever metaphor suits the example) are seen as dynamic processes within the larger context of human interaction, all frame typologies and their interrelations (e.g., p. 6) can be seen as the description of particular examples, or possible frozen moments in time. Which frame will encompass the other cannot be determined beforehand in more than a general and superficial way. As noted above, Wendland lists cognitive frames as encompassing

sociocultural frames, leading to the following hierarchy: sociocultural > organizational > situational > textual > lexical. But if sociologists are right, the sociocultural frames may be more fundamental than the cognitive (at least in most cases), and in any given case the focus of one frame may make it prominent in ways that override the supposed hierarchy. Thus an inadvertent slip of the tongue can turn a lexical frame into a determiner or transformer of the situational and other frames in an instant. It seems better (to this reviewer) to eschew taxonomies and hierarchies altogether and work out in all directions from the basis of a cognitive environment based on dynamically structured human interaction.

This sort of social science approach to cognitive frames turns other lists in the book on their heads as well. Thus on pages 23-25, Wendland lists various “world-view cognitive filters” in a hierarchy in which belief systems are more fundamental than one’s sense of identity, which in turn lead to a set of values for the individual or group, and so on. But identity for social scientists is certainly foundational for belief systems. Or better put, there is an integration of these and other filters in complex patterns depending on each and every imaginable variable in dynamic interaction with the others. Some social scientists (George Lakoff, Mary Douglas) go so far as to say that these categories and hierarchies are fundamentally the result of the purposes of the investigators, and are not essentially internal to the structures in question (of cultures, in this case). Douglas has gone so far as to coin the phrase “similarity is not a property” (but rather the result of the goals of the investigator).

But if human interaction is not structured as Wendland presents it at times (reporting accurately the work of many cognitive scientists), how does it work? Not surprisingly, Wendland includes a few references to one possible answer to this question as well. On page 94 he lists some criticisms of the model he has presented which are instructive. He quotes Mona Baker to good effect:

The most serious weakness is that the components and entities are often treated as static phenomena that exist in a fairly stable environment which the analyst can simply document and use to generate an analysis of events and behavior. . . . The idea, then, is not to throw lists of apparently static situational components out altogether but to use them merely as starting points for analysis, to acknowledge that they are not all necessarily relevant in every context and, more importantly, that every element is open to negotiation in the course of a given interaction.¹

The key word is *negotiation*. For scholars such as Baker and David Katan (*Translating Cultures*—as well as George Lakoff, Mary Douglas, Erving Goffman, and others) this is what drives and determines the direction of the dynamic use of frames by individuals and groups. Just as the meaning of words and sentences are negotiated, the negotiated presentation of the self in social situations (through deference and demeanor) is the foundation and necessary prelude to all further communicative diplomacy.² We first negotiate co-presence with others, and then move on to the rest of our interaction and communication.

1 Mona Baker, “Contextualization in Translator- and Interpreter-mediated Events,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 38 (2006): 325-28.

2 Among others, E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-face Behavior* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

In spite of the above critique, Wendland's tendency to document lists of various kinds has decided advantages, especially for pedagogy. Thus on pages 226 and following, he outlines "a multiple framework for qualitative assessment" of translations. His diagram is quite helpful in seeing the forces and tensions at play in the task of translating. Yet Wendland himself would be the first to note the limitations of such a static representation of the situation. It could seem as though good translation is simply a matter of finding the sweet spot between fidelity and intelligibility, for example, while all translators know they must strive to fully maximize both while at times being willing to sacrifice one or the other in fairly dramatic ways. Also, all the elements are not equal in all situations. Proximity of form generally counts for more in certain poetic structures than in narrative, for example, yet even there it is the *function* of the form, not the form itself, which is the object of the translator's desire.

It is unfortunate when small editorial issues take away from any work. The book suffers at times from a bewildering array of page formatting, likely due to various sources being brought together. On page 127, it seems that a whole section referring to Song of Songs 8.10 has been repeated under the heading of 8.12. These are small details, but such a rich book in content deserves better treatment in form.

Wendland has (as usual) given the reader much to ponder, and this book is indeed a useful "Coursebook for Bible Translators and Teachers" (the subtitle of the book). The book's author encourages users of the material to see it as a heuristic guide (p. 2) for further thinking about translation. In that role, this book is one anyone interested in translation (and especially Bible translation) should have in their library.

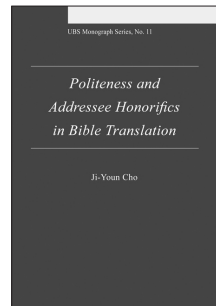
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by Ji-Youn Cho

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