ERNST R. WENDLAND

ON THE RELEVANCE OF "RELEVANCE THEORY" FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION

The author is a UBS Translation Consultant based in Lusaka, Zambia.

Anyone who translates a verse [of Scripture] literally is a liar; anyone who adds to it is a blaspheming libeler.[1]

Translation strategy in relation to "relevant" communication goals

Let me begin with a brief reflection upon the rabbinical quote that heads this article, a longer variant of the more familiar *traduttore traditore*. Most of us would probably agree that a "literal" translator is a "liar": In practice s/he inevitably "subtracts from" the intended sense of Scripture and frequently also "adds" wrong or unintended meanings. But to whom does the designation of "libeler" refer? This is no doubt the "paraphraser," or "free" translator. S/he too "adds" to the intended sense, but does so deliberately—in contrast to most literalists, who are usually quite ignorant or unaware of the negative effects that their procedure has on the biblical message in another language. However, as every experienced translator knows, these two are not the only translation types that may be distinguished. In fact, there is a *continuum* of possibilities ranging between the two poles of literalism and paraphrase, that is, of a text having a relatively greater formal as opposed to a primary semantic orientation with respect to the source document.

Where then do, or should, we stand? That depends on where our priorities lie. If we designate the *meaning* of the original as being our norm—the benchmark for evaluating translation quality—then we are situated somewhere in the modern mainstream. But one must always remember that "meaning" is manifold; it encompasses considerably more than that which was probably conceived of by whoever formulated the ancient rabbinic saying above. It is certainly more than pure referential (or conceptual, denotative, etc.) "content." Thus the translational continuum remains, and every Bible translation team must establish its priorities, principles, and procedures with respect to form, content, and intent (function) in relation to both the source language [SL] and the receptor language [RL] texts and contexts.

That suggests another appropriate motto, namely, "*Translation is a trade-off.*" One way of applying this would be as follows: You exchange the various forms of the SL for different RL forms, and conversely, you trade away helpful, even highly relevant and meaningful, possibilities of expression in the RL in order to gain (or retain) as much as possible, or certain desired aspects, of the complete meaning "package" expressed in and through the SL message. That is the general principle being considered here—in short, the selective, meaning-based, goal-oriented, interlingual *re-FORMulation* of an extant text. There is thus a renewed emphasis on linguistic and literary forms, but now the frame of reference and standards of quality are determined with reference to the special artistic genius and stylistic inventory of the RL. Obviously, this sort of method needs to be further elaborated

1 From the Babylonian Qiddushin 49b, cited in J. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (Anchor Bible), New York: Doubleday 1990, 12.

upon in order to prevent potential misunderstanding. Due to space restrictions, my presentation will be limited to an exploration of this general thesis in relation to a particular theory that has recently received considerable attention in translation circles, namely, that which is based upon the so-called "principle of relevance."

The relativity of "relevance theory"

Pioneering work in the cognitive-inferential approach to communication which has come to be known as "relevance theory" [RT] was done by Sperber and Wilson,[1] and this was extensively applied to the field of Bible translation by Ernst-August Gutt [G].[2] Gutt's helpful approach, which is the primary basis for my observations, has stimulated a great deal of fresh discussion in the field and has provoked a needed reevaluation of many past axioms and methods. Some valuable insights have thereby been gained into the nature of translation with special reference to the vital importance of one's current conceptual "context" in the process of text interpretation.

Unfortunately, however, the expression of what would seem to be one of the fundamental assumptions of RT constitutes a denial of its own central area of concern, namely, verbal *communicability*. Thus Sperber and Wilson's "principle of relevance" states that "every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance."[3] Somewhat more helpful is a pair of explicatory "conditions" which are intended to elucidate this rather enigmatic principle: First, "an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are *large*," and second, "an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is *small*."[4] Apparently that implicit polarity was too strong a position, for it has been toned down somewhat by Gutt to read as follows:[5]

> The central claim of relevance theory is that human communication crucially creates an expectation of optimal relevance, that is, an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation will yield *adequate* contextual effects at *minimal* processing cost.

The problematic second condition has since been further revised to state: "...without requiring *unnecessary* processing effort."[6]

However, the difficulty with this entire notion remains: It is a criterion that is itself too *relative*, for how can it be assessed and by whom? Due to the nature of the theory, i.e., receptor-(reader/hearer)-based and psychologically oriented, the only one who can properly evaluate the "relevance" of any given instance of ostensive (overt) communication is the individual addressee him- or herself based

---

1 For a detailed introduction to this approach, see D. Sperber and D. Wilson [S&W], *Relevance. Communication and Cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell 1986.

2 See Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, Oxford: Blackwell 1991; also *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*, New York and Dallas: United Bible Societies and Summer Institute of Linguistics 1992.

3 S&W, 158; cf G 1992, 25.

4 S&W., 125; italics added.

5 G 1991, 30; italics added.

6 G 1992, 25; italics added.

7 *Ibid.*, 27; original italics.

on what is going on in his/her mind at the time (or thereafter).[1] And each person is going to differ from someone else in this regard because s/he is starting out from, as well as directly accessing, a different set of conceptual assumptions and premises during the ongoing interpretive process.[2] Now it is possible through various careful testing procedures to arrive at an approximation (only!) of the set of cognitive assumptions (part of the so-called "world-view") of an individual (averaged out for a group) and the extent of his/her/their understanding of a certain act of message transmission, whether oral or written. But how does one determine the relative degree of mental *effort* involved during communication—and hence "relevance" in this concomitant respect?

Problems are compounded since the criterion of processing effort is closely tied to that of "contextual effects." What are they?

> These can be of three kinds: they can consist in the derivation of *contextual implications*, in the *strengthening*, or confirmation of assumptions already held, or in the *elimination* of assumptions due to a contradiction.[3]

"Contextual implications," in turn, "are inferences that follow not from the propositional content of an utterance alone, nor from the contextual assumptions alone, but only from the inferential combination of the two sets of propositions."[4] Again, these would seem to be restricted to the conceptual framework of the *individual*, hence highly subjective criteria. Furthermore, when working through the preceding and other principles of RT, one soon begins to wonder why communication has apparently been limited largely to the *cognitive* domain—to "propositional content".[5] What about the crucial "connotative" (emotive, affective, relational) overlay that accompanies all communication and which is paramount in certain types of discourse, from conversational pleasantries to classical poetry? This dimension of meaning is to a great extent ignored in the discussion and application of RT.[6]

In any case, to tie the diagnostic principle of relevance to "the *cost-benefit* relation of processing effort spent versus contextual effects obtained"[7] is at best a convenient over-simplification, and may even distort our understanding of the communicative process. The twin goals of "adequacy" and "minimal effort" in relation to the "information offered" would seem to apply in the strictest sense only to certain basic types of communication where it is desirable "to make this task as

---

1 One can of course define and evaluate the "relevance" of any message also in relation to its source, e.g., "S/he conveyed aspects of the subject that were most *relevant* to her/his own situation." But this is not the perspective adopted by the proponents of RT. In the matter of Bible translation, the major concerns of the original author as expressed in his text are just as relevant in the communication process as those of modern-day receptors.

2 These are termed the "cognitive environment" and "context" respectively (G 1991, 25-26).

3 *Ibid.*, 27; original italics.

4 *Ibid.*, 27.

5 "The context of an utterance is 'the set of premises used in interpreting [it]'...[It] refers to part of their [i.e. the communication partners'] 'assumptions about the world' or *cognitive environment*...The cognitive environment of a person comprises a potentially huge amount of very varied information" (G 1991, 25-26; original italics).

6 For example, the parenthetical remark that appears in G 1992 (71) says too little and comes rather too late in the presentation. Similarly, although the "semiotic approach" to *connotation* is first mentioned in S&W (57), the subject is not really dealt with in detail until the final portion of the book, i.e., 217ff. In fact, S&W's criticism that "the semiotic approach is more comprehensive only by being more superficial" (57) applies in many respects also to the applications of RT.

7 G 1992, 24.

easy, or 'economical,' as possible for the audience,"[1] e.g., so-called "phatic" utterances (greetings, farewells, and similar "small talk") or elementary didactic material (such as children's Sunday school lessons). Elsewhere, certainly in the case of literary texts and also profoundly religious ones such as the Bible, it is frequently the case that one will derive greater contextual effects the *more* concerted effort one puts into the activity of interpretation. In such instances the relationship of these two critical factors is more or less directly proportional in nature, and it is confusing to state it in the bare maximum [benefit]-minimum [cost] terms, as is so often the case in descriptions and applications of RT.[2] Rather, the goal is to attain the *maximum* number of contextual effects in the *most effective* manner for the particular audience and setting concerned, regardless of the degree of processing effort required. People are usually prepared to work harder at texts which they know contain messages that will benefit them—not only cognitively, but emotively, motivationally, and hopefully spiritually as well. The economic adage, "you get what you pay for," would presumably be just as applicable, if not more so, in many communication events of great personal consequence. This may well be what the advocates of RT intend to say. If so, they need to clarify their argument, especially when it is applied to the theory and practice of Bible translation.

On "direct" and "indirect" translations (or is it "literal" and "idiomatic"?)

A second major RT distinction that I wish to consider is the notion of "indirect" and "direct" translations, which is based on the difference between indirect and direct quotation in verbal discourse. As we move from the former to the latter type of rendering, we shift from a definite emphasis upon the receptor in the act of communication to a corresponding concern for the source:[3]

> A receptor-language utterance is a direct translation of a source-language utterance if, and only if, it presumes to interpretively resemble the original completely (in the context envisaged for the original).

This contrasts with an "indirect" translation, which is not explicitly defined, but may perhaps be described as follows:[4]

> [It is one in which]...the intended interpretation of the translation should resemble the original...in respects that make it adequately relevant to the audience—that is, that offer adequate contextual effects [and]...in such a manner that it yields the intended interpretation without causing the audience unnecessary processing effort.

The problem here is to a certain extent one of strategy: Gutt promotes and illustrates the receptor-focused, twofold principle of relevance for the larger portion of both of his books (1991 and 1992), a presentation that appears to culminate in an overview of the "indirect" (= idiomatic?) approach to translation.[5] But then at the end he turns the tables, as it were, and expresses a strong concern for the SL text, context, and authorial intent. I certainly do not object to this latter emphasis,

1 *Ibid.*, 25.

2 See for example, W.C. Winckler and C.H.J. van der Merwe [W&M], "Training Tomorrow's Translators: Some Theoretical Pointers," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*, XIX (1993) 48, n 18.

3 G 1992, 66; cf 1991, 163.

4 1992, 42.

5 Cf G 1991, 121, 125-129; W&M, 53-54.

which is demanded by the nature and purpose of the biblical message itself. It is just that the entire argument of RT seems to have gotten in the way of this essential point by "ostensibly" leading readers along in a different direction. The analogy of direct and indirect speech only confuses the issue because it deals with an implausible instance.[1]

A direct quotation is essentially a *reproduction of the original stimulus*. However, this cannot be completely true even within the same language, for it is clearly not possible to reproduce "all of the properties of the original utterance," at least not in oral communication. Certain important phonological and paralinguistic properties of the original will always either be lost, distorted, and/or contradicted. Perhaps this is just another instance of the bias towards *written* discourse that is evident in most discussions of RT (see below).

Furthermore, it cannot really be said that "a direct quotation frees us from someone else's interpretation"[2] since that depends a great deal on both the speaker and the setting in which the quotation is used (cf the common political strategy of [mis]"direct"[ed.] citation!). If such skewing exists even within the same language, how much more so will this be a characteristic of communication across diverse languages and cultures? Thus, the analogy of "direct translation" would appear to fail the test of credibility, and we simply burden translators with an impossible goal if we "now make this our basic demand":[3]

> We want to produce a stimulus in the target language that will communicate to the target audience the full interpretation of the original, that is,...it will share with the original *all* implications the original author intended to communicate.

The problem remains despite an attempt to tone down such an objective through the vague notion of a "presumption of interpretive resemblance" and the unrealistic stipulation that "the target audience [must be] in a position to use the original context for interpreting the translation."[4] Indeed, no translation can ever be "independent of the receptor-language context" because the language itself vitally incorporates "context," both the cognitive and the situational aspects, within itself. For the same reason it is impossible to completely separate "linguistic problems" and "contextual problems."[5] The two are indissolubly joined due to the very nature of language, culture, and human communication.

Another problem that arises in this connection is the indirect appeal to a "literal" translation.[6] Thus the relatively literal RSV is promoted as "an instance of direct translation" largely because it relies "on the audience to supply the contextual information necessary for understanding."[7] Nothing is mentioned, however, of the stylistic and conceptual skewing that inevitably ensues due to interlingual differences. It is also rather misleading to claim that a "direct" (i.e., formal correspondence) translation is "closer to the original meaning once readers

1 G 1992, 62; original italics.
2 *Ibid.*, 63.
3 *Ibid.*, 65; original italics.
4 *Ibid.*, 66.
5 *Ibid.*, 73.
6 It may be noted that this "red-flag" term is not used, but it is disguised by alternatives [euphemisms?], such as a "less explicit rendering" (G 1992, 70), a "wider approach" (73), or a "stricter" translation (75).
7 G 1991, 171.

know more about the Bible."[1] That would be a debatable issue even in the case of receptors who are genuine experts in Hebrew and Greek! How *much* "more," for example—or again, "meaning" in what *specific* sense? Now I am not claiming that there is no place for a literal-type translation in the church (or better perhaps: a more literary-inclined "liturgical" version). Such a rendering can be very profitably used to give receptors some idea of the formal terminology and structures of the original as a *complement* to a meaning-oriented text. But where the fullest *possible* meaningfulness (including the connotative and elocutionary aspects)—and indeed "relevance" itself—is desired, there is no substitute for a functionally dynamic and stylistically idiomatic, "more explicit"[2] version.

Revising the "principle of relevance"

In view of the preceding argument, a summary of the aim of Bible translation might be restated in terms of "relevance" and another popular method as follows:

> The primary goal is to communicate the *closest functional equivalent* of the biblical message to a clearly specified group of receptors in a way that is *most accessible* in terms of the originally intended *contextual effects* and *most appropriate* in terms of *textual effectiveness* with respect to structure and style in the RL.

The "functional equivalence" approach[3] looks at translation from the perspective of semiotics and sociolinguistics with a decided focus upon principal communicative functions in diverse social contexts, i.e., "expressive, cognitive, interpersonal, informative, imperative, performative, emotive, and aesthetic."[4] It thereby adopts a more comprehensive view of "meaning" than the cognitively oriented RT approach. The qualifier "closest" indicates a concern for important formal features of the source document, particularly those that either convey meaning in and of themselves (e.g., certain larger semantic arrangements and structural patterns) or which serve to highlight and reinforce aspects of thematic significance.[5] The term "equivalent" acknowledges the impossibility of any effort to attain within a translation itself "the full intended interpretation" of the original in terms of "complete interpretive resemblance."[6] Instead of the nebulous attempt to obtain a certain "adequacy" of contextual effects through the application of "minimal effort,"[7] one seeks to reproduce the overall communicative relevance of the biblical text in a manner that is "most accessible" to an average member of the receptor group (not necessarily every person by him or herself). An emphasis is thus maintained with respect to the essential "message" of Scripture, but this is now

1 G 1992, 70.

2 *Ibid.*, 70. Indeed, the degree of "explicitness" necessary would be guided by the principle of relevance and "flexibility" factors such as those outlined by Timothy Wilt in "Flexibility Continua in Language Choice," *JOTT*, 7:2 (1995) 60-82.

3 J. de Waard and E.A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1986, 36.

4 *Ibid.*, 25.

5 For an overview of some of the principal factors that need to be considered in the matter of assessing translation "fidelity" in terms of the degree of flexibility allowed with respect to various types of formal modification, see Wilt, "Flexibility Continua" and E.R. Wendland, "A Communications Model for the Measurement of Fidelity and Naturalness in Bible Translation," *OPTAT*, 2 (April 1987) 1-36. Note that the former article corrects several misleading notions found in the latter.

6 This is the goal as stated in G 1992, 71. Such an objective would seem particularly difficult to achieve in cases where the "explication of implicit meaning" is discouraged, as in G *ibid.*, 72-3.

7 *Ibid.*, 25.

evaluated in terms of a factor that is more widely testable (i.e., audience comprehension and associated group reaction), rather than being isolated in the mind of each individual receptor, as a strict application of RT would entail.

By implication, this restated principle (call it "relevant equivalence" or "equivalent relevance") would take into consideration such important RT concerns as the "communicability" of the original and the "contextual gap" that separates contemporary receptors from the initial target audience.[1] The various pertinent contextual effects (i.e., cognitive, emotive, and volitional) that might potentially arise from a transmission of the closest natural equivalent of a given passage may have to be *prioritized* in cases where they cannot all be conveyed and then *apportioned* according to the different textual and extratextual translation resources that are available. Thus the form of the message in the RL does not have to be explicitly limited by the subjective criterion of "minimal effort" at all, but overall naturalness is supported through a concern for "appropriateness in terms of textual effectiveness." Moreover, a semantically more explicit expression of the original is generally promoted, for this will be the usual outcome of a desire to achieve an idiomatic structure and style on both the macro- (including literary genre) as well as the micro-structure of indigenous discourse.

The textual "explication" of implicit meaning, whether "linguistic" or "contextual" (including not only information content, but also emphasis, emotion, impact, and appeal), need not be viewed as a threat to the intended meaning of the biblical text.[2] There are dangers, of course, and considerable care must be taken in this endeavor by those who are competent and experienced translators (hence the need also for continual testing and revision). But the dangers of literalism and/or the allowance of too much "open-endedness in communication"[3] are, in my experience, much greater, especially when working with receptors who are less capable with respect to their actual ("functional") literary competence. The hope of a gradually rising proportion of the local constituency that is becoming more qualified in terms of literacy, general education, and specific Scripture knowledge may be valid in certain regions and settings,[4] but it does not quite seem realistic in many other areas of the world, especially those which are characterized by rising birth rates and declining economic as well as educational standards.

In this connection, one observes that a reliance on extratextual means—explanatory/corrective/compensatory footnotes in particular—would appear to contradict one of the fundamental principles of RT and "ostensive communication":[5]

> ...the *first* interpretation found to be consistent with the principle of relevance must be the *intended* interpretation.

---

1 G 1992, 28 and 30.

2 As is suggested, for example, in G 1992, 70-75. It is interesting to observe that T. Farrell and R. Hoyle employ the principles of RT to come to the opposite conclusion, for example: "Thus, in the light of relevance theory, a translation with implicit information made explicit in the text would be more relevant than a literal translation with footnotes or other extratextual aids supplied, since it would require less processing effort to gain the same contextual effects" (in "Translating Implicit Information in the Light of Saussurean, Relevance, and Cognitive Theories," *Notes on Translation*, 9:1 [1995] 8).

3 G 1992, 72.

4 *Ibid.*, 75.

5 *Ibid.*, 25; italics added.

Assuming for the moment that this is so (I don't know how one can test it), it would support the actual text of a translation as being the *primary* vehicle of communication (along with illustrations), while everything else is secondary—that is, not as ostensible and hence effective. If, for example, a literal rendering leads an audience to arrive at an immediate, but wrong, understanding of the author-intended meaning, which frequently happens even to practiced Bible readers, then a footnote on its own will probably not help that much. For one thing, readers might not even consult the footnote at all—since the passage already makes sense (albeit wrongly) and therefore does seem "relevant" to them as it stands. Secondly, if they do happen to read the footnote and discover the error in their initial understanding, then they must first mentally "unlearn" the prior interpretation which they derived from the text itself and then attempt to comprehend the new one provided extratextually. This is not a very efficient manner of communication.[1]

The preceding discussion provides a certain amount of justification for a type of translation that leans in the direction of greater naturalness and explicitness in order to preserve a greater degree of "fidelity" to the communicative dynamics of the original text in relation to a given contemporary receptor community. As conveyers of the Bible's diverse literature, we face a major problem, namely, how to deal with the prominent rhetorical-poetic dimension of our source in terms of both form and function. The distinct communicative intentions of the message ultimately transmitted (especially its informative, expressive, and imperative varieties)[2] should match—to the extent possible—those of the SL document, but this can be accomplished only through the use of RL-specific forms. This exigency would seem to demand a literarily more "dynamic," functionally equivalent version so as to reproduce—or to compensate for—the biblical text's initial oratorical "relevance" and stylistic vitality by means of appropriate literary and rhetorical devices in the RL. Such a translation will almost certainly manifest a grammatical style and diction which is higher than that of the "common language" level. In other words, it will be one that more fully reflects "popular language" in the society concerned.[3] However, the primary communicative "contextual effects" derived from the biblical text would hopefully be expressed thereby in a manner that is both more "accessible" in terms of meaning and "appropriate" in terms of form. Such intelligibility and naturalness should serve in turn to encourage a more frequent *reading* of the Bible, which is one of our primary goals (a more effective *hearing* is discussed below).

The proof of a theory is in the teaching thereof!

My criticisms of RT are not meant to deny or depreciate the specific contribution that this approach, and Gutt's application of it in particular, have made to Bible translation. The RT perspective certainly helps to increase one's awareness of the great importance of the cognitive "*context*" (among other contexts) in the complex process of human communication—in the biblical as well as the contemporary

1 The argument here, first formulated in a draft of this article three years ago, has received some recent and more detailed support in Farrell and Hoyle, "Implicit Information," 11-13.

2 E.A. Nida and C.R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1969, 24-26. This classic threefold distinction and definition has been restated and somewhat modified over the years, but not essentially changed or greatly improved upon.

3 *Ibid.*, 125.

situational settings. RT also rightly emphasizes the prominent role that "*implicit*" information (especially implicatures) plays in message transmission, both then and now. This leads in turn to a greater emphasis on the current "context of translation." In this respect, primary translation goals must always be considered in relation to the needs, desires, and expectations of the receptor constituency, including the major Christian denominations, on the one hand, and their abilities (literary as well as linguistic) and formal resources on the other (e.g., available Bible translations and secular literature—traditional and modern, oral and written).

In short, the RT approach is extremely useful for Bible translators to become familiar with—*if* modified, or perhaps rephrased, along the lines suggested in the discussion above and carefully integrated *within* a more explicitly comprehensive, text-context oriented, structure-functional methodology. In the presentation of Hatim and Mason, for example, the specific concerns of "relevance" are treated as part of "the pragmatic dimension of context," which includes the related notions of elocutionary structure, power and status, interpretation and inference, as well as effectiveness and efficiency in translation.[1] Furthermore, the admittedly "reductionist" tendencies of RT[2] must be resisted along with the temptation to include too much within its scope while at the same time dismissing all other theories and methodologies. Thus there is a danger that all-encompassing statements like the following might be misunderstood:[3]

> In all instances we were able to account for the [translation] phenomena in question without reliance on descriptive-classificatory theory, and indeed without reliance on any translation principles or rules.

But as K. Malmkjaer observes:[4]

> It is obvious that what one gains from the principle of relevance in terms of generality of application must be balanced against what one would lose in terms of specificity if *nothing but* this principle were made available to translators.

My personal feeling is that RT fails to satisfy the claim noted above with respect to its own key criteria of "relevance," that is, "*adequate* contextual [cognitive] effects" coupled with "*minimal* processing effort."[5] Its distinctive terminology alone is a formidable, perhaps impossible, barrier to overcome, at least for ordinary translators. More important is the fact that it is seriously deficient with respect to offering the necessary *concrete* guiding principles (and their associated contextual effects) when it comes to dealing with specific translation problems.[6] Therefore, RT can, and probably should, be incorporated into some existing, tried and tested, meaning-based translator training program,[7] but it must not be allowed to replace, or even dominate, the curriculum.

---

1 B. Hatim and I. Mason, *Discourse and the Translator*, London: Longman 1990, ch 5.

2 G 1991, 188.

3 *Ibid.*, 188.

4 K. Malmkjaer, "Review: Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context," *Mind & Language*, 7:3 (1992) 304; original italics.

5 G 1992, 25.

6 Malmkjaer concludes: "...if [translation theorists and practitioners] want direct help with their everyday concerns, they should not expect to find it here" ("Review," 306).

7 K. Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics 1986. Such a basic textbook could well be augmented by exercises that deal with a number of the text-genre and pragmatic features noted in the study of Hatim and Mason (1990).

One further reason for such caution is the possibility that its controversial, and to my mind quite misleading, distinction between "direct" and "indirect" translation might initiate a general retreat back to a more literal method of Bible translation (which is far easier to perform), coupled with an over-reliance upon extratextual aids to make up for the difference, i.e., in the overall meaning that is conveyed to most receptors. While I do not think that this was either the explicit recommendation or the intention of Gutt's works, this is how his application of RT to translation is often being interpreted, as indicated in the following citation from a recent proposal for "training tomorrow's Bible translators":[1]

> By using the technique of direct translation, Bible translators can make the original texts communicate better... True enough, a direct translation is aimed not at furnishing the receptor language audience with immediate cognitive effects but, rather, at representing the source text in the receptor language by imitating its communicative clues reliably...we suggest that the technique of direct translation is the best available means for trying to meet both the need to be faithful to the original text of the Bible and the need to make the text of the Bible communicate successfully...we are urging everyone involved in making and using translations of the Bible to face the reasons why they might decide to "give up on **indirect** translation" and "go for direct translation."

In the concluding portion of this paper I want to give one more important reason why such a shift should not be made, at least not in many parts of the world—the region of South-Central Africa to be specific.

The dynamic dimension of oral-aural communication

In Gutt's 16 "general principles of successful communication in translation"[2] and Winckler and van der Merwe's 14 "pointers...for the training of...Bible translators,"[3] very little is said about the particular channel or medium whereby the Scriptures are communicated, though a written text appears to be assumed.[4] This would seem to be a critical oversight, for "in general far more people hear the Scriptures read than read them for themselves,"[5] that is, through liturgical and homiletical presentation, participation in group instruction, "oral" reading, and use in the public media of radio, television, and audio or video cassettes.[6] An important principle of Bible translation, therefore, is "the priority of the heard language over the written language" when preparing the RL text.[7] This fact has some important ramifications as far as a team's translation policies and procedures go.

For one thing, the significance of what we might call this "oral-aural factor" would definitely encourage an "indirect" or "narrow approach" to translation which "builds mainly or almost exclusively on the translated text alone" rather than a "direct" or "wider approach that anticipates contextual gaps and incorporates additional [extra-textual] means for narrowing or closing these gaps."[8] The latter

1 W&M, 55-56; original emphasis.
2 G 1992, 67ff.
3 W&M, 44ff.
4 For example in G 1992, 68, 71 and W&M, 55-56.
5 De Waard and Nida, *Functional Equivalence*, 199.
6 Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 28-29.
7 *Ibid.*, 28.
8 G 1992, 73.

has reference to "appropriate bridging strategies" such as footnotes, a glossary, "study notes, [and other] separate background materials."[1] Obviously, these supplementary helps are not usually available to listeners of the text (unless a reader happens to include the footnotes, etc. in his/her presentation, which rarely happens). An audible translation must be independently comprehensible and more or less immediately comprehended by an average RL audience. This ideal would certainly seem to support a more "dynamic" method of translation—one that is not only more idiomatically composed in terms of style but which also includes a greater degree of "explication of implicit meaning."[2] Such a text is not only more "hearable," it also tends to be more "readable" as well—audibly that is—because the lector more readily understands what s/he is reading aloud and can therefore articulate the appropriate intonation. An oral-aurally oriented version would be especially "relevant" to and appreciated by people who live in societies where this is still the predominant mode of verbal communication. They can mentally "process" such texts more efficiently (that is, with less "effort") and correspondingly derive more "contextual benefits" from them.

There is a growing body of evidence which suggests that most, if not all, the original texts of Scripture were actually written with oral elocution and aural reception in mind.[3] One cannot miss the dramatic forcefulness and a corresponding phonesthetic impression that is made when the typically recursive biblical text is read aloud in the original language by a trained lector.[4] For example, there is at least one proposal that the entire "narrative" of Jonah (i.e., not only ch 2) was composed in the rhythmic form of Hebrew poetry,[5] which would appeal largely to the ear. This too is a prominent aspect of the total "meaning"-complex of the original message that ideally ought to be either reproduced in a translation or somehow compensated for, both within the text itself as well as by means of the typographical format whereby it is presented in print. It is very difficult to duplicate the dynamics of oral-based discourse such as we have in the Scriptures via a literal type of translation. This is because of the many fundamental structural differences between the two languages concerned—phonological, morpho-syntactic, and rhetorical. It may be possible to artificially create certain rhythms and other sound effects, but this would undoubtedly make the text even more difficult to understand as it is being read. Thus the formal constraints imposed upon the translated text will have to come, not from the SL, but from the RL, in particular, the stylistic features characteristic of the specific genre that has been selected to embody a given passage from the Bible.

The question is: How can we re-"oralize" the biblical text for the majority of receptors today who actually will apprehend the text aurally? As suggested above, there are two principal ways in which this may be done. One is to prepare a more "reader-friendly," or "read-able," text so that the benefits of an accurate and

1 *Ibid.*, 71.

2 *Ibid.*, 73.

3 See P.J. Achtemeier, "Omne verbum sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 109:1 (1990) 15, 17; E. Wendland, "Oral-Aural Dynamics of the Word, with special reference to John 17," *Notes on Translation*, 8:1 (1994) 19-21.

4 On this point with reference to the book of Jonah, see J. Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, Louisville: John Knox/Westminster 1993, 26-28.

5 D.L. Christensen, "Narrative Poetics and the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah," in E.R. Follis (ed.), *Directions in Biblical Poetry*, Sheffield: JSOT Press 1987, 29-48.

comprehensive discourse analysis of the original, coupled with a natural, functionally-equivalent "re-structuring" in the RL (including the format of the printed page),[1] can be transmitted with greater intelligibility to a listening community.

The second way of achieving such compositional relevance (already intimated in the preceding) is to utilize a RL literary (oral/written) genre that will most closely match the biblical passage in terms of its intended purpose, content, sociocultural context, and religious significance.[2] Certainly, as Gutt properly emphasizes, the expectations, needs, and concerns of the receptor constituency (both present and future) also need to be taken into serious consideration in such a more "dynamic" enterprise, where a much higher proportion of indigenous rhetorical-poetic forms are used.[3] This is especially important in situations where people have become accustomed to the literal style of an existing version, either in the RL itself or some major trade language. Indeed, a certain amount of experimenting coupled with explanation will be necessary to point out, for example, that the idiomatic rendering is not intended to replace a formally more correspondent version. It rather seeks to complement the older translation as a means of manifesting to people today more of the overall "relevance" of the Scriptures—that is, to augment their understanding of the Word on its own terms first of all and also to increase their appreciation for the artistic and rhetorical nature of the biblical text itself. But secondly, the aim is to sharpen their awareness of the Bible's indispensable significance for their own lives, times, and circumstances.

L. RONALD ROSS

BRIEF NOTE ON FORM AND MEANING

The author is a UBS Translation Consultant based in San José, Costa Rica.

Anyone engaged in the enterprise of Bible translation knows well that it is often necessary to alter the structure of the source text to preserve its meaning in the receptor language. This issue receives abundant attention in every manual on translation and confronts us daily in our work. However, even though we expect structural changes, occasionally their implications can be surprising, even distressing, particularly when the structure of the source text carries significant pragmatic meaning that seems to fall by the wayside in the translation.

Some time ago I was checking the 15th chapter of the book of Acts in the Bribri language, spoken in southern Costa Rica. In 15.12, according to the Greek, Paul and Barnabas were relating to the congregation the miracles God had wrought *through them* among the Gentiles:

esigēsen de pan to plēthos, kai ēkouon Barnaba kai Paulou exēgoumenōn hosa epoiēsen ho theos sēmeia kai terata en tois ethnesin di' autōn.

1 For some suggestions with regard to some of these issues, see J.P. Louw and E.R. Wendland, *Graphic Design and Bible Reading: Exploratory Studies in the Typographical Representation of the Text of Scripture in Translation*, Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa 1993, ch 4.

2 For a detailed report of some initial experimentation in this area, see E.R. Wendland, *Comparative Discourse Analysis and the Translation of Psalm 22 in Chichewa, a Bantu Language of South-Central Africa*, Lewiston NY: Mellen 1993.

3 G 1992, 69-75.