WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ONE PICKS UP THE GREEK TEXT?

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ABSTRACT

A few issues of hermeneutic nature related to Bible translation are considered. It is argued that the chosen philosophical framework (for instance, a modernist or post-modern approach) determines the way in which any process of translation is approached. Attention then shifts to some of the presuppositions and assumptions of literal translations. These presuppositions are discussed critically. Another factor determining the nature of a translation is the intended function of that particular translation. If, for instance, the intended function is to be understandable for ordinary, present-day readers, a meaning-orientated translation would be preferable. Lastly, the role of interpretation in the translation process is considered. The assumption that no interpretation takes place in the case of word-for word translations is critiqued.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bible translation is like swimming in the sea. The first-year student of Greek "splashes in the waves" while the professional translator "struggles in the deep"; yet, both can have a feeling of accomplishment. We can even say that both of them "swim", but what they do and how they do it, differ vastly. This is exactly the problem: when can we really call a translation a translation?[2] Answers to questions like these are becoming increasingly difficult and complex.

Translation is a dynamic process involving a substantial number of implicit as well as explicit choices to be made.[3] When one picks up the Greek text, one is indeed drawn into a complex debate, dealing with hermeneutic, dogmatic, exegetic, socio-cultural, linguistic, and literary questions.[4]

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2 See Naudé (2001:180-193) for a description of the different models of translation.

3 Newmark (1993:7) maintains that "(t)ranslation is always possible, more or less. Usually … it calls on priorities, compensations, compromises."

4 See Whang (1999:47-49) on the complexity of translation.

In this article, a few issues of hermeneutic nature are considered. The article takes the form of statements followed by discussions. The statements deal with

- the philosophical framework of translation,
- some of the presuppositions and assumptions of literal translations,
- the intended function of a particular translation,
- the emphasis of a translation which determines its nature,
- the role of interpretation in the translation process.

2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK OF TRANSLATION

Statement 1: The current debate on Bible translation[5] *takes place in a mostly modernistic and in some cases even a positivistic framework. Accepting a post-modernistic philosophical framework will lead to a different debate with different results.*

In most cases, translation theory[6] still uses the terminology and philosophical tools of modernism and even positivism.[7] Terminology like "finding the meaning", "decoding conventions", "words mean this or that", "the meaning in the target language must be the same as in the source language", etc. are typical examples of expressions functioning within a modernistic framework. It is assumed that there is something definite of which the *meaning* can be determined, which then can be rendered in a different language with a large measure of correspondence.[8]

5 This remark is made within the framework of the South African debate.

6 Naudé (2001:177-193) gives an overview of different approaches to the process of translation. The shift in emphasis between the different approaches is clearly illustrated. This, of course, implies a shift in philosophical presuppositions.

7 According to Gardner (1991:16)

> positivism can be summed up, though too simply, as "the principle that a law means exactly what its words *say*, neither more nor less" (Hirsch 1976:22). Usually, a translation based on this view of language would seek to reproduce as closely as possible the words and grammar of the original (source) language in the other (receptor) language, adjusting only as necessary to the linguistic forms of the receptor language.

8 In spite of criticism against the term "equivalence", it is still widely used since most translations suppose a degree of equivalency with the original text (Muntingh 1998:506).

From a deconstructionist, post-modernist or even post-foundationalist perspective this process will not be valid or even possible. According to this perspective, phrases like the above cannot be used, since the existence of independent meaning or truth is denied in favour of subjectification or atomisation.[9] Following these lines will result in a completely different idea of what a Bible translation is supposed to be. The question could indeed be asked whether a Bible translation is at all possible in the sense in which it is thought of in the current debate. In other words, if — due to one's philosophical denial of the existence of meaning that can be determined independently — one does not have anything definite or specific to translate, what does one translate in the end? Phrases like "accurate translation"; "true to the original", etc. cannot function in such a context.[10] Neither can statements such as "*the* norm for *the* best or *the* ideal translation".[11]

In light of the above remarks, it should be acknowledged that there are philosophical issues that should be addressed more seriously. Take, for example, the indispensable lexicon of Louw and Nida.[12] Apart from questions about the limited sources[13] used for determining the semantic fields or the way in which the classification of the semantic fields is done, the lexicon was conceptualised and prepared in the 1970s and 1980s (therefore before the rise in the Biblical field of deconstruction and post-modernism[14]). We are confidently confronted with structures of meaning and semantic fields presented in a modernistic undertone: "this is how it was". Moreover, since we know "how it was", translation might even seem easy as we can simply "apply" these semantic structures. The problems a post-modernist will have with this type of approach are evident and it should not be ignored in planning any translation.

By mentioning this, I do not imply that I agree with all the presuppositions and often arrogant claims of post-modernist exponents. It must, however, be granted that they have opened the eyes of the academic community to several important issues. For instance, the myth of any dogma as "ab-

9 Philosophers like Schleiermacher and Gadamer have already pointed out that the reader is involved in creating meaning (De Kruijf 1998:162).

10 Since the existence of meaning within a particular context is acknowledged, it might imply that the members of each context must make their own translation, which will last until the context changes.

11 Van Leuven-Zwart cited by Muntingh (1998:503).

12 Louw & Nida (1989).

13 Basically only New Testament sources were used.

14 See Naude's (2001:179) reference to Bassnett & Lefevere.

solute a-historical truth" is exposed. This makes the translators aware and hopefully sensitive to their own particular dogmatic presuppositions. Translating their "dogma" into the text should be avoided.[15] The importance of the relative *context* of the receiver, as well as the multi-dimensional — and therefore relative — nature of meaning, is also often underlined. It should be recognised that these are the real issues the translator is confronted with. These questions cannot and should not be ignored. Questions such as what constitutes meaning, how understanding takes place, and how words, sentences or genres function in this process to guide understanding, etc., should receive even more attention than in the past.

The discussion on the philosophical presuppositions of translators and translations should receive increasing attention. The importance of this debate may indeed be seen in the different models, and indeed the differences between these models discussed by Naudé (2001:179-193).

3 SOME ASSUMPTIONS OF A WORD-FOR-WORD TRANSLATION

Statement 2: Reasons for word-for-word (literal) translations are mostly based on (a) dogmatic presuppositions,[16] *specifically the mechanical theory of inspiration of Scripture. (These dogmatic presuppositions have dominance over the linguistic, literary, and socio-cultural considerations in the process of translation.) Word-for-word translations are further based on (b) the assumption that translation involves the conveying of the vocabulary terms and grammatical forms, which implies, so is assumed, that no "interpretation" is necessary.*

Although it is not claimed that these are the only two reasons, they are, however, two of the most important reasons.

One of the main reasons for the support of a word-for-word translation is the dogmatic claim that only the (original) Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic texts are divinely inspired. Inspiration is mostly seen as a mechanical event.[17] This implies that the text as a whole, i.e. words, structure, syntax,

15 This is the point Peacock (2000:201-213) makes.

16 Newmark (1993:79) writes on the non-neutrality of translators that they "cannot be neutral where matters of fact or morality is concerned."

17 Inspiration was viewed differently during the process of translating the original Hebrew text into Greek (LXX). Greenspoon (2000:*ad loc*.), for instance, maintains:

> It cannot be proven to be so, but it is reasonable to maintain that the Greek text, whatever its precise origins, would be viewed by many first-century Jews as equal in authority to the Hebrew. Such

grammar, etc. is inspired.[18] The implication is clear: if only the "original" was inspired,[19] no translation can consequently be inspired.[20]

How does one deal with this problem, according to the supporters of this view? By staying as closely as possible to the grammar, syntax, structure, words, etc. of the original — the further one moves away form the "original" the further one moves away from the inspired word of God. A good and trustworthy translation is therefore a translation that stays as "close as possible" to the inspired text, although the translation might not be regarded as being inspired itself. Any measure by the translator of what may be regarded as "interpretation" is evaluated in a negative light (and even regarded as "evil").[21] This obviously means that anything else than a literal translation should be rejected, since it moves away from the words and form of the inspired text.[22] The further it moves away, the less accurate it is, since accuracy and trustworthiness are measured in terms of their view of inspiration.

It must be noted that the above argument is not based on sound linguistic and literary arguments, but on specific dogmatic presuppositions.[23]

> a view goes back at least as far as the second century B.C. *Epistle of Aristeas*, which describes the reception of the Greek Pentateuch at Alexandria in language unmistakably reminiscent of Moses' giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai. The first-century A.D. Jewish philosopher Philo was surely not alone in maintaining that those responsible for the Septuagint were more than mere translators—they had functioned as authentic and true prophets.

Obviously, questions about the way in which the Holy Spirit works, or the inspiration of the translator and how it differs from the inspiration of the original author, are relevant in this regard. However, it cannot be discussed here. Neither will I go into a critique of the mechanical theory of inspiration of Scripture.

18 See, as example of this position, Forrest who quotes several scholars to substantiate his position.

19 See Arichea (1990:55-62) for more on the inspiration of Scripture.

20 See Allert's assessment of inspiration and translation (1999:111-113).

21 Noorda *et al*. (1998:209).

22 Sterk (1994:130) maintains that

> literal translation fails because it is largely insensitive to the difference in the way the form/meaning interaction takes place in the source language and the way it operates in the receptor languages.

23 Dogmatic and other issues had an influence on translations from the earliest of times. Greenspoon, for instance, maintains that more Greek translations of the Hebrew text were made quite early "…as a result of conscious efforts to update or modify the Hebrew for cultural, theological or other ideological reasons."

It should also be realised that the above is not the only theory of inspiration of Scripture. To my mind, it is not even the most commonly accepted theory in academic circles. To allow such a theory to dominate the method in which the Bible is translated, ignoring obvious literary and linguistic elements, is unacceptable. Literary and linguistic voices should not be vetoed by dogmatic presuppositions in the translation process.

> *Excursus*: The "tension" between literal and free translations is not a modern issue. Support for both approaches is present in ancient as well as medieval times. Ancient translations of the Hebrew text did follow a fairly literal approach to translation, but did not hesitate to make adjustments for the sake of better understanding.[24] Paraphrase was also characteristic of the *targumim*, since the aim of targumic production was to give the sense of the Hebrew Scriptures.[25] Although the Aramaic translation 11QtgJob can be classified as literal translation, it often changes the poetic structure in an effort to make the Hebrew text more understandable.[26] Often homilies were added in the *targumim*.
>
> Noorda *et al*. (1998:208) cite Maimonides, a twelfth century Jewish philosopher, who already remarked that word-for-word translations result in unclear and unsure translations. Maimonides maintains that a translator should rather communicate the idea(s) clearly. To "add" or "leave out" words in the receptor language is therefore acceptable if the idea is communicated effectively according to the characteristics of that particular language. Noorda *et al*. (1998:209-210) mention that Luther did not insist on translating words, but also valued meaning in the translation process, although one should not deviate from the acceptable use of language.

The assumption that the translator should remain as faithful as possible to the original, implies for some that only the vocabulary terms and grammatical forms of the original writings should be conveyed and reflected within the document in the target language. These are regarded as the "codes" of language that can be "translated" into the respective "codes" in the receptor language.[27] That is the translator's sole task, since translators

24 Greenspoon (2000:*ad loc*.) also remarks:

> The first translators of the Pentateuch adopted a fairly literal approach toward that text, although not without introducing some interpretive elements that would bridge the gap between ancient Israel and Hellenistic Egypt.

25 Chilton (2000:*ad loc*.).

26 Buth (2000:*ad loc*.).

27 See Van Iersel (1998).

should only focus on the text in front of them — that demarcates their "field of play". According to them, a translation should not involve interpretation, since interpretation is done by exegetes and not by translators.[28] A translator should present what is said and not what it means — (s)he is simply a conveyor of words and phrases from one language to another,[29] and this should be done by staying as close as possible to the original.[30] The translator should work with the "codes" in the text and reflect it in the translation. They do not really have to interpret that text within its broader context; that is the task of the exegete.[31] Take, for instance, a phrase like Col 2:8: κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου... (according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe...).

Looking at this example, it is understood why some scholars might feel that translation should be limited to the "codes" and that the translator should go no further.[32] The phrase κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου is simply decoded as "according to the elemental spirits of the universe", whatever that might imply or mean. The meaning is not the concern of the translator, but of the exegete and by implication the reader. The translator should simply see that the Greek words (codes) are properly presented in English. The same applies to a word like φιλοσοφία — it is encoded as "philosophy" in English, whatever that might mean.[33] The modern reader must now follow the path of exegesis to determine the meaning of the words or phrases.

28 Forrest (www.jayforrest.org) rightly points out that

> … a dynamic equivalent translation must first discover the meaning of a passage before it translates it, therefore it is partly based upon the translator's understanding and interpretation … By giving the meaning of the text rather than a translation of what it literally says, the translator goes beyond his role and becomes an interpreter.

29 But as Omanson (1996:413) puts it: "When Bible translation focuses too much on trans-coding and not enough on communication, we hinder communication."

30 See www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/.

31 See Van Iersel (1998).

32 Against this attitude of "playing safe", Wilss (1996:190) points out that "unintelligibility as a result of decision-making avoidance is probably one of the biggest sins a translator may commit".

33 It cannot be assumed that φιλοσοφία simply means "philosophy" in English. The reference of the two words may differ completely as is here the case. Ancient philosophers and modern ones are not the same. Philosophy in ancient times had to do with the art of living, which was sometimes understood within larger metaphysical perspectives. Simply replacing "codes" does not work.

Although this might seem like a valid approach, it is not an ideal option, since linguistic and literary codes cannot be separated from the formation of meaning as such. The approach results in Greek English[34] (Greek written by means of English words). Hermeneutically, it de-ecologises[35] the text by not taking into account all the elements active in creating meaning.[36] It is indeed like trying to separate the milk and sugar from a cup of white, sweet coffee.[37]

Apart from that, it has been realised since the 1980s, as Naudé (2001:181) points out, that a translation does not take place in a vacuum, but takes place within the socio-cultural ecology of the translator and his target group. This initiated the movement away from a normative and prescriptive approach to a more functional approach.

This approach is, of course, based on a particular view of what exactly translation is. It restricts the process to minimum involvement of the translator. S/he must mechanically "exchange codes" and it is then presumed that interpretation is "excluded".[38] That this assumption is untenable is nowadays widely accepted. The moment a person starts to read, the process of interpretation has already started.[39]

34 Or "Greelish", as some put it.

35 It takes the words out of their linguistic, literary, and socio-historical framework.

36 Noorda *et al*. (1998:208) mention the Italian philosopher, Croce, who argues that no text can be "repeated", since it forms part of a much larger whole, which is not repeatable. The implication is, therefore, that a text cannot be translated according to its "original meaning".

37 According to Sterk (1994:133)

> one may try to distinguish form from meaning mentally or theoretically, but in practical fact they are fully united. The one expresses the other, and without the one, the other does not exist.

38 Nida (2000:165) has pointed out that

> the relative length of a translation in comparison with the source text is not necessarily a criterion of excellence; what counts is the lexical effectiveness in impact and attractiveness.

39 It is also accepted that there are different stages of interpretation, which leads to a personal application of the text.

4. THE INTENDED FUNCTION OF A TRANSLATION

Statement 3: Hermeneutic decisions determine the translation process; for instance, decisions on the intended function of the translated text have a formative impact on the way the text is translated.

Bible translation deals with ancient historical[40] texts. How should such texts be translated? Socio-linguistically speaking, these texts are embedded in specific literary, social, and historical contexts, functioning according to their own particular conventions. This implies that, for proper understanding, proper knowledge of these contexts and conventions is needed. The question arises how much attention translators should give to these socio-historical and literary conventions in their translations and how much of these ancient conventions should be made more understandable to the present-day reader. The intended *function*[41] of the translated text is of fundamental importance in making such decisions.

The question as to the function of the Bible should be put. Is the Bible simply studied as ancient text and for the sake of being an ancient text? Or, has the Bible a religious and therefore existential function? At this point, opinions start to differ and the decisions made here will eventually determine the outcome and nature of the translation.[42] Those who translate the Bible do not usually regard it as simply an ancient text. Apart from being a historical text, the Bible is primarily a *religious text*.[43] It has a specific function in relation to the intended readers. With religious texts, there are *existential* requirements that come into play.[44] If the religious and existential impact of the Bible on the reader is given priority, the text must be translated in such a way that the desired impact on the reader follows more or less directly from the translation. Historical and communicative barriers

40 Poetic and wisdom texts are all historically determined.

41 See Nord (1997:40-45) for more on text function.

42 Naudé (2001:179-193), in his overview, shows how the question of how far a translator should go, is answered in different ways, ranging from a literal to a completely free approach.

43 See Arichea (1990:48-67) on the nature of the Bible as sacred literature, as well as De Waard & Nida (1986:20-25) on the motives for translating Scripture, the nature of the religious language of Scripture and the interpretative principles applicable to Scripture.

44 As Newmark (1993:120) rightly points out:

> Tension between original and translation is at its highest in the case of a sacred text whose intent is to proselytize.

must be avoided as far as possible.[45] The aim of such translations is to help the reader understand and existentially apply what is read.

The historical nature of the text is seen as secondary to its religious applicability — indeed a presupposition in the case of a religious text such as the Bible. It does not mean that all historical elements in Biblical texts will be replaced by present-day equivalents so that a complete and new present-day text will evolve. Not even the staunchest defender of paraphrase will defend a position where all historical elements are translated away, for instance, where Jerusalem is replaced with a city like Pretoria or New York. There will always be a tension between the historical and existential aspects of such a translation.[46] It depends on where the translator places the emphasis, which depends on how the translator perceives the *function* of the text. As Naudé (2001:193) points out, the realisation that cultural and social elements are part of the translation process increases the emphasis on the functionality of the translated text for the intended present-day reader. To translate a text with the context of the present-day readers in focus is no longer breaking the rules of what a translation should be, but is actually following those rules.

When translating a text with the aim of existential usability, historicity is usually sifted through the sift of understandability.[47] It is important to remind ourselves that the choice of translation strategy is determined by the hermeneutic inquiry into the function of the translated text, as was pointed out earlier. This obviously introduces the question of what should be changed and what should be retained, as well as how far one should go in deliberately changing or replacing aspects of the text in the translation

45 Nord (1997:39) maintains that viewing the dominant function of the source text as the decisive factor in translation should not be held up as a general rule. But,

> it nevertheless seems to make more sense to use the intended communicative function of the target text as a guideline. We might thus say "Let your translation decisions be guided by the function you want to achieve by means of your translation." This has been found to be quite a useful rule in the translation process.

46 See Weren (1998:110).

47 Maybe that is not always the case:

> One specialist in translating for the aviation industry commented that in his work he did not dare to employ the principles often followed by Bible translators: "With us", he said, "complete intelligibility is a matter of life and death". Unfortunately, translators of religious materials have sometimes not been prompted by the same feeling of urgency to make sense (Nida & Taber 1982:1).

process.[48] If it is decided that the communicative element will dominate the historical, the next question that presents itself is: "To what extent should the one dominate the other?" What type of historical reference should be left and why?[49] Since the function of the translated text plays an important role, these type of questions are relevant.

Therefore, if a choice is made for a translation of religious or existential use, clarity and understandability becomes important. This will enhance the possibilities of existential application. It will, however, imply a movement away from a word-for-word translation to a more meaning-based translation. The meaning becomes important and not the translation for the sake of the translation. The intended function of the translation has a definite influence on the translation theory that is implemented.

5. THE EMPHASIS OF A TRANSLATION DETERMINES ITS NATURE

Statement 4: Word-for-word (literal) translations and free paraphrase are positioned on one continuum, where the basic difference is one of emphasis. In the process of translating a text, the pendulum moves[50] *between emphasis on the meaning and emphasis on the form*[51] *of the original text, often in the same translation.*

Some have levelled criticism at the inconsistency of adhering to a specific translation strategy in both the 1933 Afrikaans translation and the 1983 New Afrikaans translation. Although the 1933 translation is supposed to be a word-for-word rendering, it contains phrases and sentences that are typical of a freer type of translation theory. The same applies to the 1983 New Afrikaans translation, which sometimes moves close to the dynamic-equiva-

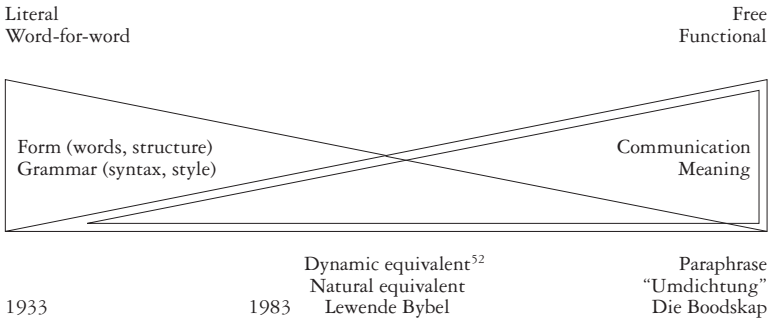
48 What happens when these questions are asked can be seen in the reception-orientated approaches (Hermans 1985:7-15; Even-Zohar 1990:45-51) and further in the functionalist approaches (Nord 1991, 1997; Reiss & Vermeer 1984). The emphasis shifts from complete focus on the source text to the manipulation of the source text (cf. Louvain Colloquium) or even the adaptation (change, additions, or omissions) of the source text to accommodate the needs of the receptors of the translation within their particular context.

49 Naudé (2001:184-185) refers to the groups working in Göttingen, who presuppose that a translation will necessarily differ from the source text, because the translator will give a specific interpretation to the text. Translation is seen as an interpretation of a literary work in a second language.

50 Newmark (1993:36) calls it a "sliding scale theory of translation".

51 With "form" the grammar and syntax is intended.

lent approach, but seems quite literal in some cases. It is a mixture of literal translation, dynamic equivalent translation, and even paraphrase. Why is this the case? This is *inter alia* so because the different approaches should not be seen as closed compartments, but rather as points on a continuum. Movement along this continuum of a particular translation is sometimes required by the Biblical text itself. The continuum may be illustrated as follows:



As is mentioned above, no Afrikaans translation can claim "purity of and absolute consistency in theory". The reason lies in the complexity of the translation process, which sometimes requires a more literal and sometimes a freer rendering according to the nature of the different Biblical texts to be translated.[53] Although a choice is usually made for a specific strategy, for instance, a literal or freer translation, experience has shown that it will sometimes be necessary to move up or down the above continuum.[54] It

52 The Dutch approach of "bronteksgetrouw en doeltaalgericht" tends to be a little more formal than the dynamic equivalent approach. See Bastiaens (1998: 152-153) or Noorda *et al*. (1998:204) for an explanation of what is meant. This approach is not without its problems, one of which is the effort to combine the formal elements with a meaning based translation. See Naudé (2001:180) for an explanation and criticism of what he calls linguistic-orientated models. It is an effort to express meaning, but the source text stays dominant.

53 In some cases, a word-for-word rendering of the Greek text will not make sense in the target language and will consequently require a different formulation.

54 The results of the Lehman's (www.egroups.com/group/bible-translation) study are interesting: He analysed the measure in which idioms are translated in an understandable (not literal) way in different translations. KJV - 5%; NRSV - 39%; NIV - 44%; TEV 83%. From these results, it is clear that not a single translation can be classified as 100% literal or 100% meaning based. One should accept that there is a movement along the continuum.

seems that when it comes to translation theories, it would be more realistic to talk of a guideline rather than hard and fast rules.[55] For example, if one wants to translate καὶ λέγει ("And (s)he said"), the result of a literal translation and a paraphrase will probably not differ much. However, in the case of a phrase like Col 2:18, serious differences can be expected: μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβευέτω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἃ ἑόρακεν ἐμβατεύων, εἰκῇ φυσιούμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοὸς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions — NIV). In approaching this sentence, choices will differ of what should be rendered literally and what should — for the sake of clarity — be formulated in a different way.[56] Most translations will have elements of both literal and less literal renderings. This is what is meant by the remark that translations should not be "locked up" in closed compartments, but rather be treated as positioned on a continuum. Some cases might require a more literal approach and some cases a freer approach to the translation process.[57]

55 Egger (1996:58) points out that the sharp distinction between formal translation and free rendering cannot be maintained any longer. "Given the newer theories of translation the difference between translating and freely rendering as an equivalent reproduction has become fluid".

56 Compare some other translations of this sentence:

> Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind (KJV).
>
> Let no one who delights in humility and the worship of angels pass judgment on you. That person goes on at great lengths about what he has supposedly seen, but he is puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind (New English Translation).
>
> Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on self-denial. And don't let anyone say you must worship angels, even though they say they have had visions about this. These people claim to be so humble, but their sinful minds have made them proud (New Living Translation).
>
> Nor let any man cheat you by your joy in Christ by persuading you to make yourselves "humble" and fall down and worship angels. Such a man, inflated by an unspiritual imagination, is pushing his way into matters he knows nothing about, and in his cleverness forgetting the head (Philips Modern Translation).

57 Newmark (1993:36) unified his dual theory of semantic and communicative translations with three propositions:

If it is true that we are not dealing with "compartments", but with a "continuum", it implies that we are simply dealing with two "poles"[58] or points of orientation, namely a literal, word-for-word approach and a meaning-based approach. The translator must decide *where* he places the focus between these two points of orientation and *why*. Some translators might focus more on a word-for-word approach, but in certain cases be obliged to give priority to meaning instead of form. It is possible, since different parts of the same translation move along a continuum, based on the requirements of the text. As Naudé (2001:184) indicates, the issue is no longer a literary or non-literary focus, but both.[59] A translation might have a specific focus, but the different parts of the translation might be associated with different positions on the continuum.[60]

> (a) the more important the language of the text, the more closely it should be translated;
>
> (b) the less important the language of a text or any unit … the less closely that too need be translated, therefore it may be replaced by the appropriate normal social language;
>
> (c) the better written a unit of the text, the more closely it too should be translated, whatever its degree of importance, provided there is identity of purpose between author and translator, as well as a similar type of readership … There seems no good reason not to reproduce the truth, even when the truth is not particularly important.

58 According to Newmark (1993:137)

> there are two poles of translation, one intended to capture "full meaning", the second to convey "simple message", and as usual there is a large interlapping area between the two. At the first pole, translation is descriptive, at the second it is a speech-act … designed to produce a result or to have a result produced.

59 Baker (1992:6) writes that

> a text is a meaning unit, not a form unit, but meaning is realized through form and without understanding the meaning of individual forms, one cannot interpret the meaning of the text as a whole.

60 Though De Waard & Nida (1986:182) identify four distinct theories of translation that have been dominant at various times, they point out that these theories actually serve(d) in complementary fashion.

6. THE ROLE OF INTERPRETATION

Statement 5: Interpretation is a complex part of the reading process — it depends on who is doing it and when.

A major point of criticism from the supporters of literal translations against meaning-based translations is that the more words one uses and the less one reflects on the structure of the original, the more interpretation from the translator is required. That is why a word-for-word translation is preferred, as it limits interpretation during the translation process. This, according to the advocates of literal translation, equals accuracy of translation.[61] However, that a translation can be made without interpretation is a myth.[62] In the first place, all translations (even the most literal) are the product of interpretation by the translators.[63] In the second place, the readers of the translation must also interpret what they read. There is a correspondence between these two "interpretative processes" (i.e. that of the translator and that of the proposed reader). It can be said that, to a certain extent, the reader "takes off" where the translator ends.[64]

Interpretation by definition takes place whenever one reads a text and tries to understand it.[65] In the case of the Bible, what must be interpreted are words, language, and semantic structures of an ancient language produced in an ancient pre-industrial situation.[66] To make proper sense of these texts implies specialist knowledge of the linguistic and cultural environment of the text, as socio-linguists constantly inform us. When the present-day real reader who is without any specialist knowledge, is confronted with

61 See the citation in Allert (1999:92).

62 Allert (1999:92) calls it a "naïve" since

> translation is not simply a matter of finding equivalent words in two languages. It is the complicated task of transposing material from one world of thought and language to another.

63 Noorda *et al*. (1998:209) point out that as soon as reading starts, interpretation starts. In actual fact, interpretation should not be seen as part of the translation process, but translation is rather embedded in the interpretation process. Weren (1998:97) also correctly states: "Iedere vertaler is tevens een verklaarder; uit de vertaling spreekt een bepaald begrip van de tekst".

64 See Egger's (1996:54) diagram of translation as a process of communication.

65 And "is it not a matter of interpretation to decide which translation best fits the context of a passage?" (Allert 1999:93).

66 De Waard & Nida (1986:185) identify the cultural and temporal distance between the source texts and the present day as one of the special problems with regard to Bible translation.

a literal translation of the text, s(he) is expected to interpret this foreign text in its ancient conventions, without having the required specialist knowledge to make responsible decisions. Of course, some sort of understanding will take place, since a sort of understanding always takes place when reading a text. Nevertheless, the present-day reader takes the ancient text and interprets it within and with the influence of present-day contexts. The possibility for misunderstanding seems a real and ever present danger, for the reader will use his or her own known linguistic and literary conventions to decode the linguistic, literary, and social codes of the ancient text.[67] It therefore makes sense that the present-day reader of ancient texts needs some assistance in interpreting these ancient codes today. This can be done in several ways by using, for instance, footnotes,[68] commentaries, or to add enriching notes to the text that will help the reader to interpret conventions that are foreign to him or her. A translation can assist understanding by interpreting the ancient linguistic codes and expressing their meaning in the conventions of the target language. Therefore, a "specialist" translator helps the reader along the way of interpreting the text.[69] The specialist can, of course, also make mistakes. Nevertheless, these mistakes will usually be of less magnitude than the ones made by an uninformed reader. I would, so to speak, prefer to follow the interpretation of a specialist rather than try to make sense of a text that is embedded in foreign linguistic structures without the necessary knowledge.[70] If a committee of specialists makes the translation, it is even better.[71] The choice is simple — either walk as a blind man in the dark or follow the one-eyed man with the lamp through the dark.

67 According to De Waard & Nida (1986:185)

> this (temporal and cultural) distance (between the source texts and the present day) serves to increase the obscurities and ambiguities usually resulting from our ignorance of the setting of the various discourses.

68 It is not possible to go into the dynamics of footnotes here, but it should be realised that footnotes communicate in a special way. The rhetorical effect of footnotes remains in question.

69 The warning by Peacock (2000:202-203) must be taken seriously. Keeping in mind the responsibility of the translator, he says that if the translator allows external extra-textual influences like prejudices or theological bias, to affect his or her translation, accuracy is abandoned.

70 I do not feel comfortable with the extreme of focusing on the receptors and their needs, as the functionalist approach of Nord (1991, 1997) seems to suggest. See also Naudé (2001:185-186).

71 See Peacock (2000:212) and Bratcher (www.talk.religion.misc) who also emphasise that group work might limit non-textual interference and limits idiosyncrasy.

This type of *interpretation* should, however, be distinguished from the *application* of the message in the life of the real reader. This is not the translators' task, as they are not busy with hermeneutics in this sense.[72] Translators should also caution themselves not to allow such a measure of interpretation and free rendering that the reader of the target language will be tempted to move outside the semantic possibilities of the source text.[73]

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

What happens when one picks up the Greek text to translate it? Even before the translator starts to read the first Greek sentence, a whole range of important questions should be asked and answered.[74] This is done consciously or unconsciously. The way these questions are answered will determine the outcome of the translation process.[75] This article has raised some of the issues that beg for consideration before the translation process can even start. Translators should constantly be aware of these issues and of the answers — be it implicitly or explicitly — they have given in each case.

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72 Ellingworth (1983:167) also stresses the *limits* of a translator's task:

> (The translator's) sole but inalienable function is that of replacing one set of arbitrary linguistic signs by another, grammatically different but semantically equivalent, set of equally arbitrary linguistic signs. He is a midwife, not a parent, and even parents must some day let their children go.

73 See Weren (1998:98).

74 See, for instance, the questions asked by Egger (1996:55).

75 Egger (1996:55) writes: "Depending on which question is seen as taking precedence over the others, the translation will turn out differently".

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Keywords

Bible translation

Hermeneutics

Literal translation

Meaning-orientated translation