

Dynamic Equivalence and its Daughters

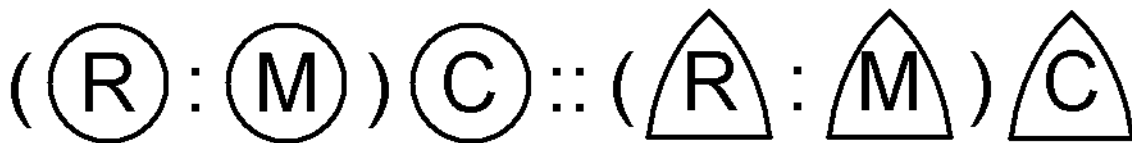
Placing Twentieth Century Bible Translation Theories in their Context

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Rise of Dynamic Equivalence 1964-1986

Dynamic Equivalence is a theory of translation developed by Eugene Nida and first presented in two key books, *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), and *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969). The core of Nida's explanation of the goal of dynamic equivalence was explained in the following way:

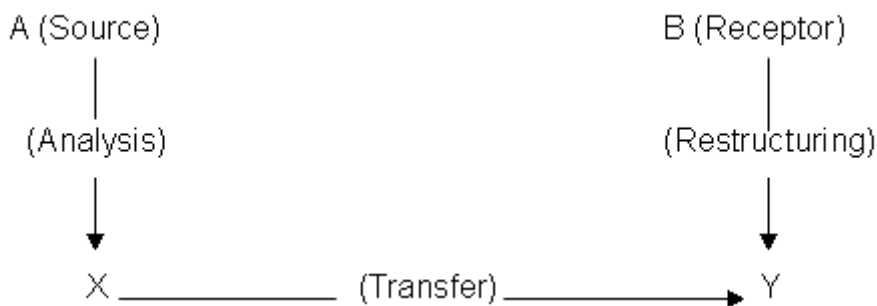
Formula for Dynamic Equivalence:



“... the receptor in the circle culture should be able, within his own culture, to respond to the message as given in his language, in substantially the same manner as the receptor in the triangle culture responded, within the context of his own culture, to the message as communicated to him in his own language.” (Nida EA, *TST* 1964:149)

Dynamic Equivalence Model of Analysis – Transfer – Restructuring:

Nida explained the process of translation in the following way:



“Mechanics” of Dynamic Equivalence:

Four key elements make up the concept of dynamic equivalence, as found in Nida's writings:

- Reader Response
- Classes of Lexical Symbols (TEAR)
- Kernel Structures

- Analysis-Transfer-Restructuring

Nida asked the following question:

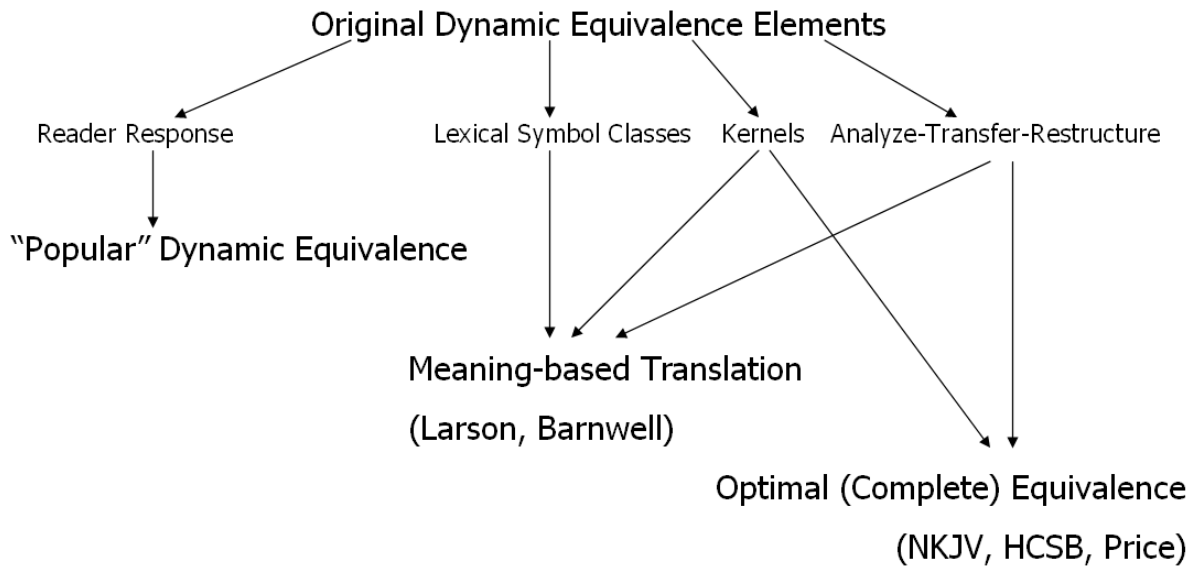
Is translating, for example, an art or a science? Is it a skill which can only be acquired by practice, or are there certain procedures which can be described and studied? The truth is that practice in translating has far outdistanced theory; and though no one will deny the artistic elements in good translating, linguists and philologists are becoming increasingly aware that the processes of translation are amenable to rigorous description. When we speak of “the science of translating,” we are of course concerned with the descriptive aspect; for just as linguistics may be classified as a descriptive science, so the transference of a message from one language to another is likewise a valid subject for scientific description. Those who have insisted that translation is an art, and nothing more, have often failed to probe beneath the surface of the obvious principles and procedures that govern its functioning. (Nida EA, *TST* 1964:3)

Major Publications in Bible Translation Theory and Practice:

- Nida, Eugene – ***Bible Translating*** (1947, 1961)
 Nida, Eugene – ***Toward a Science of Translating*** (1964)
 Nida, Eugene, Charles Taber – ***The Theory and Practice of Translation*** (1969)
 Beekman, John, John Callow – ***Translating the Word of God***. (1974)
 Barnwell, Katharine – ***Introduction to Semantics and Translation: with special reference to Bible translation***. (1980)
 Nida, Eugene, William Reyburn – ***Meaning Across Cultures*** (1981)
 Nida, Eugene, Jan de Waard – ***From One Language to Another*** (1986)
 Price James D. – ***Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation***. (1987)
 Barnwell, Katharine – ***Bible Translation: An Introductory Course for Mother-Tongue Translators***. (1990)
 Gutt, Ernst-August – ***“Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation.”*** (1991)
 Wilt, Timothy (ed.) – ***Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*** (2003)
 Price, James D. – ***A Theory for Bible Translation: An Optimal Equivalence Model***. (2007)
 Wendland, Ernst – ***Contextual Frames of Reference in Translation*** (2008)

Dynamic Equivalence and its “Daughters”

a graphic representation of the relationships between the various positions that have arisen from Nida’s original theory:



Theory	deep structure analysis	translation process	classes of lexical symbols	target audience	reader response
dynamic equivalence	kernels	analysis-transfer-restructuring	object words, event words, abstracts, relationals	non-Christian	adequacy of the translation must be judged in terms of the way people respond to it
functional equivalence	kernels	analysis-transfer-restructuring	object words, event words, abstracts, relationals	Christian	sociosemiotic approach to meaning – understanding impact on original hearers
meaning-based translation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beekman-Callow • Barnwell • Larson 	propositions	discover, transfer meaning	Thing, Event, Abstraction, Relation	“someone who has had little or no contact with Christianity”	dynamic fidelity does not require an answer to all the questions which might be raised about a topic under discussion
	propositions	discover, transfer meaning	events, attributes (only terms mentioned in <i>Bible Translation</i>)	“as intelligible as possible to non-Christians, while recognizing that certain parts of Scripture are addressed specifically to Christians”	hearers from the Receptor Language culture will be able to understand correctly the meaning that the original author intended to communicate
	propositions	discover, transfer meaning	things, events, attributes, relations	any average speaker of the language	“how can you really measure response?”
optimal equivalence	kernels	analysis-transfer-restructuring	nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions	the audience selected by the project guidelines	not a necessary ingredient of a translation theory – if translation accurate, response is purely the outcome of free will

Communication Theories

Major Publications for Relevance Theory:

- Sperber D and Wilson D 1986. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Gutt Ernst-August 1991. *Translation and Relevance : Cognition and Context*. Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA : B. Blackwell, 1991

Comparison of Code Model and Inference Model

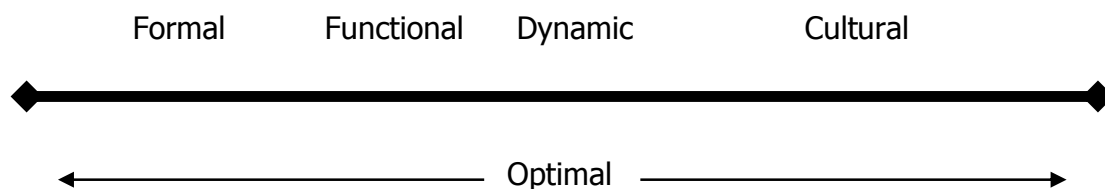
- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code Model – all information necessary to be understood is in some way encoded in the message • Expanding the translation will reveal all the latent or implied information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inference Model – communications are geared to optimal relevance and economy • Direct and indirect translation – direct assumes the same common knowledge, indirect supplies it in some way in the text or out of the text |
|--|---|

Observations and Conclusions about Bible Translation and Theory

Equivalence Theories

- Schools of general translation studies have mostly rejected equivalence as not possible
- Dynamic equivalence, intended to be descriptive, has become prescriptive
- Tends to microscopic look at translation rather than holistic look
- Useful primarily as a pedagogical approach to help in restructuring between languages
- Best understood as a palette of possibilities

“Equivalence” as a Bible translation norm, a “palette” or “cline”



“Scientific” Translation

- A scientific method is a repeatable procedure with the same results each time
- Scientific translation is more a description of machine translation than of human translation
- We still know very little if anything about the actual mental process of translation, certainly not enough to describe it scientifically

Descriptive Translation

- The establishment of “norms” rather than “rules” is one of the goals of descriptive translation studies (DTS)
- DTS promotes the study of translations more than of translation
- DTS in Bible translation studies is very new, so the results are still not in

Functional translation and Skopostheorie

- The “translation brief” is an intelligent way of laying out the goals and functions of the translation project
- Skopostheorie tends to have a “market” aspect tied into it, since in general translation so much depends on the client’s wishes and intentions

The Cultural Turn

- All theories and writings over the last 20+ years have swung much more to social and cultural issues related to translation
- A translator should not just be bilingual but also bicultural as much as possible
- The mediation of the translation process by western personnel is a danger to the cultural transfer
- A major goal of training approaches should be to help the translator to understand the ancient culture of the biblical world

What about Relevance Theory?

- Is it “relevant”?
- No major school of general translation studies has adopted it
- Applies best to “live” conversation
- Applies clearly to the process of teaching and interpreting the Bible, but not as clearly to translating it

Possible Ways to Cope with Bible Translation Theories

- Pick one and hang on for dear life
- Chuck them all and be an artist
- Take a dab of this and a dab of that

For the worde of God is liuely, and mightie in operation, and sharper then any two edged sword, and entreth through, euen vnto the diuiding asunder of the soule and the spirit, and of the ioints, and the marow, and is a discerner of the thoughtes, and the intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:13, Geneva Bible)

Additional Resources:

Barnwell, Katherine. *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course for Mother-Tongue Translators*. Dallas: SIL International, 1990.

Carson D. A. "The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation." *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 1985. 9:200-13.

de Waard, Jan and Eugene Nida. *From One Language to Another*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986.

Kerr Glenn J. "Dynamic Equivalence and its Daughters: Placing Bible Translation Theories in Their Historical Context." *Journal on Translation*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2011. (paper soon to be published, copy available on the SGI website)

Glenn, chief translation consultant for Bibles International, part of Baptist Mid-Missions, has worked for 16 years with translation projects involving over 30 people groups, working in francophone West Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. Glenn also serves as an adjunct professor of linguistics at several universities. He and his wife Becky reside in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They have three married children (two sons and a daughter), and six grand-children.