Bible Translation in the UBS

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I. Introducing the Nida & Post Nida Perspectives: *Third Presentation*

Introduction:

Bible Translation in the UBS in the 20th Century was characterized by the Nida perspective. Eric M. North's brilliant appreciation of Eugene Nida's life and contributions written to mark his 60th birthday in 1974 is good place to begin. (See Matthew Black and William Smalley, eds. *On Language, Culture and Religion In Honor of Eugene A. Nida*, The Hague: Mouton, 1974: vii-xxvii). Nida's interest, labours and contribution to Bible translation began in the late 1930's and continue to this day albeit in a limited way. Nonetheless his writings and ideas dominated the field for the rest of the century. We are all to various extents indebted to him.

1. Just to name a few, Eugene Nida's key contributions to our field:

a) He was trail blazer and pioneer through the medium of his ground breaking books, eg. *Bible Translating*, ABS, 1947 & *Toward and Science of Translating* E. J. Brill, 1964, *The Theory and Practice of Translating* (with Charles Taber), E. J. Brill, 1969 (Translation Studies),

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Customs and Cultures, Harper & Row, 1954 (Cross Cultural Studies), *Message and Mission*, Harper & Row, 1960 (Communication Studies), *Componential Analysis of Meaning*, Mouton, 1975 & *Greek Dictionary based on Semantic Domains* (with Johannes Louw) (Semantics and Lexicography), etc.

b) He pioneered through his global travels and field visits to translation teams in remote locations world wide much of what UBS translation consultants are still doing today.

c) He recruited and trained the first group of UBS translation consultants. This original group multiplied to present day levels. More significantly Nida contributed in a fundamental way to the professionalization of Bible translation. William Smalley has written that "The promotion of professional expertise, the development of translation of theory and of translation procedures based on such theory, began when Eugene Nida joined the American Bible Society staff in 1943' (William Smalley, *Translation as Mission*, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1991: 28).

d) He promoted and popularized the theory of dynamic equivalence translation, later renamed functional equivalence translation . This was given powerful embodiments through popular model translations such as the *GNB* and *CEV* in English, *DGN* in German, *FC* in French, *Version Popular* in Spanish, *Biblia Habari Njema* in Swahili, among others.

e) He provided leadership to teams involved in the creation and development of the best critical editions of both the *Biblia Hebraica* and the *Greek New Testament*.

f) He promoted the development of UBS translators' helps such as the *UBS translators handbooks*, *monographs*, *TBT*, etc

2. Some Characteristics of the Nida perspective:

a) Originally inspired and grounded in prevailing theories of linguistics,

it slowly evolved to include insights from anthropology and cross cultural studies, communication theory, semantics, lexicography and semiotics.

b) Its approach to translation although essentially functionalist and in principle capable of generating a multitude of translation possibilities tended to confine itself to promoting the so-called common language translations of the *GNB* variety. This was perhaps encouraged by the missiological situation of the time.

c) It approach to translation although based on a relatively sophisticated model of communication (see *Message and Mission*, Harper, 1960) deeply grounded on insights from cross-cultural communication, it still understood translation as a reproduction of meanings and thus promoted a dependence on what Michael Reddy referred to as the "fallacy of the conduit metaphor" (see Michael Reddy "The Conduit Metaphor A case of Frame Conflict in Our Language about language" in Andrew Ortony ed., *Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge, 1979: 284-324, see also William Frawley's discussion of this in "Text, Mind and Order" - appearing as a chapter of his *Text and Epistemology*, Norwood, NJ, Ablex Publishing Corp., 1987: 129-181). According to this metaphor "language is a system by which humans package ideas in words and send those packages across to receivers who then extract those ideas from the words to successfully complete the communication dyad or exchange" (*ibid*: 130). This poses the problem of context free, objective meanings independent of time and space.

d) Nida & Taber's three stage approach to translation (analysis, transfer and restructuring - "(1) analysis in which the surface structure (i.e., the message as given in language A) is analyzed in terms of (a) the grammatical relationships and (b) the meanings of the words and combinations of words, (2) transfer, in which the analyzed material is transferred in the mind of the translator from language A to language B, and (3) restructuring, in which the transferred material is restructured in order to make the final message fully acceptable in

the receptor language."(*TAPOT*, p33) tended to stay focused on sentence & kernel level (*ibid*: 39) and tended to encourage a bottom-up strategy that ignored discourse considerations, genre studies, literary theoretic considerations. James Holmes (1988: 100) correctly claimed in the 1970s that: "No adequate general theory of translation can be developed before scholars have turned from a sentence-restricted linguistics to produce a full theory of the nature of texts. Such a theory will devote extensive attention to the *form* of texts - how their parts work together to constitute an entity -, to the way texts convey often very complex patterns of meaning, and to the manner in which they function communicatively in a given socio-cultural setting".

e) The Nida perspective developed within the context and ideology of a Eurocentric, conservative Protestant missionary driven movement. It however grew to partner with the Catholics and to take advantage of developments spanned by the Vatican II fall out. Although it never took on the character of a fully fledged interconfessional movement, fully integrating all Christian confessions and traditions including those of the Orthodox and the new churches of the Southern continents its openness to all cultures and traditions and its inbuilt striving toward globalism and inclusivity became a powerful internal dynamic.

3. Some Characteristics of the post-Nida perpective:

a) Bible translation is no longer understood purely in linguistic terms but in terms of an integrated interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary perspective drawing on the insights of not only of the full range of linguistic studies, but equally of cross-cultural studies, literary studies, communication studies, biblical studies, archaelogy and historical studies as well as the human and social sciences in general.

b) Bible translation is now characterized by a variety of approaches such as the literalist, functionalist, literary, post-colonial, foreignization/

domestication perspectives.

c) Bible translation as well as other translation phenomena are increasingly being understood in terms of the idea of re-writing texts an idea best captured by Susan Bassnett & Andre Lefevere as follows: "Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live" (in Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, Routledge, 1995: vii).

d) Bible translation now increasingly understood in terms of the contexts of its production e.g. the sociocultural, organizational, ecclesial/ confessional, the sociohistory/ biography/ ideology of translation teams, expected text functions, etc. This may also be understood generally in terms of the idea of frames (an idea developed and popularized by Marvin Minsky in an influential article-, see also the new UBS volume edited by Timothy Wilt, *Bible Translation Frames of Reference*, St. Jerome, 2002).

e) Definitions of translation no longer understood in simplistic terms a la Nida's idea of reproduction of meanings but variously a la Venuti as "**a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation**" (see, Venuti 1995: 18). To which Venuti (*ibid*) makes the observations that: "Both foreign text and translation are

derivative: both consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials that neither the foreign writer nor the translator originates, and that destabilize the work of signification, inevitably exceeding and possibly conflicting with their intentions. As a result, a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, inspecific social situations, in different historical periods. Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one to one correspondence. Appeals to the foreign text cannot finally adjudicate between competing translations in the absence of linguistic error, because canons of accuracy in translation, notions of 'fidelity' and 'freedom' are historically determined categories. Even the notion of 'linguistic error' is subject to variation, since mistranslations, especially in literary texts, can be not merely intelligible but significant in the target-language culture. The viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it is produced and read". Others might view translation generally as a mediated, interlingual and intercultural communication event involving at least two languages a source language and a target language, in which a translator on the basis of his/her knowledge of both the source and the target languages and their underlying cultures and values, produces a target text in the target language based on his/her reading and interpretation of the source language text, usually in accordance with the perceived needs of the target audience and the perceived functions or intentions of the source language text or the skopos/brief or commission of the translation. The quality, effectiveness and success of this event is a function of all these factors. Of course this whole issue of giving a definition of translation is much more complex. Many recent practitioners have themselves abandoned the search. It may not be easy now to produce a definition of translation that is as widely accepted as the Nida & Taber definition was/is.

Some of the leading translation scholars now opt for an empirically based concept, ie - translation as any target language utterance presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds (Gideon Toury).

f) Within the UBS the general tendency now is for functionalist-literary approaches that respond with sensitivity to the stated needs of the churches targeted at the diversity and variety of audiences and markets.

II. Some Frequently Aaked Questions About Bible Translation in the UBS - *Fourth Presentation*

1. WHY? Why do we translate?

a) Hebrew Scriptures (OT) originally written in Hebrew except for a few passages in Aramaic (i.e. Daniel 2.4b; 7.28; Ezra 4.8-6.18; 7.12, 26)

b) The New Testament and Septuagint originally written in Greek

c) The Example of Septuagint

d) The Example of Jerome and the Latin Vulgate

e) The Example of Martin Luther and the German Bible

f) The Use of translated Bible to satisfy perceived needs of the churches for:
  i) Evangelism
  ii) Christian Teaching and theological study
  iii) Liturgy and Worship
  iv) Maintenance of Doctrinal stability and continuity
  v) The Call and Challenge of the Church's Mission and Vision

g) The Bible as the Foundational document of Christian Church -

ecumenical & inter-confessional function

h) The Bible as a Literary document impact on other literatures, cultures and languages

i) The Example of the 19th Century Evangelical Revival and Missionary movement, the rise of the Bible Society Movement BFBS UBS National BS

2. WHAT?

a) What is translation?

Eugene Nida's classic definition (1969: 12) - "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style". A complex set of questions generated, such as the following:

- source text postulate
- transfer postulate
- relationship postulate
- the problem of equivalence (a mathematical concept?)
- the problem of similarity

b) What is the basic unit of translation - Words, Sentences, Paragraphs, Discourse Units, Genres, Whole Texts ? How does the total language system and its underlying socio-cultural system affect the meanings generated by any of the above units?

c) What is the role of Interpretation in translation in the context of the following:
- the problem of perspective
- the problem of power
- the problem of pluralism and diversity

d) What do we translate? What is the Source Text?
i. Hebrew OT?
ii. Greek NT/Septuagint?
iii. Established and leading translated Bible texts in the so-called

international languages such as English/French/German/Portuguese, Spanish, etc?

   iv. Translated Bible texts in dominant regional languages?

e) What canon do we translate? - the problem of canon
   i) Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox canons
   ii) Proto-Canon
   iii) Deutero-Canon 7 books or 14 books
   iv) Order and Arrangement of books
   v) Versification

3. FOR WHOM?

a) For whom do we translate?
- Adults or Children?
- Men or Women
- Youth & Children
- Christian or Non-Christians?
- Educated or Non-educated?
- Theologians & Biblical Scholars or Non-Theologians & Non-Biblical Scholars?
- Catholics or Protestants or Orthodox or the new churches?
- Literate or the non-literate
- Print or non-print
- Which speakers of the language (dialect, high vs. low, literary vs. common, etc.)

b) The place of socio-linguistic surveys/ market surveys, etc?

c) The role of ideological/confessional/theological orientation/agenda in determining audience groups the example of the NIV/R-NIV

d) For what purpose, function or use is the translation to be put?

e) Does theology/ideology etc. affect translation?

4. WHO?

a) Who translates? Some historical examples

b) Who should translate / What are the qualifications of an ideal Bible translator?

  ■ Moral integrity and authority of the translator

  ■ Faith commitment or belief system or ideological orientation of the translator

  ■ Educational (general) level

  ■ Linguistic knowledge of SL, RL/TL

  ■ Knowledge of Biblical cultures, texts and of biblical languages

  ■ Knowledge of TL cultures, literatures and languages

  ■ Native habitual (mother-tongue) speaker or foreign (second language) speaker? How much command or competence is required?

c) A one person product or a product of team work?

  ■ Structure of a translation Team

  ■ Role of a representative team of reviewers (age, dialect, church, gender, education, specialisms, etc)

5. WHEN?

a) When should a translation happen?
   Who initiates a translation?
   Who owns a translation?
   Who should decide when to start a translation?
   What conditions should be satisfied before starting a translation?
      ■ Personnel
      ■ Office
      ■ Translation & Reference Resources
      ■ Computer Resources
      ■ Financial Resources

b) How is translation need determined?
      ■ By the Church/Churches
      ■ By the Bible Agencies ?
      ■ By concerned individuals?

- As a result of socio-linguistic/ market survey?
- When some concerned native speakers request?

c) Is interconfessional co-operation/church partnership a factor? How important?

d) Should the availability of other translations in the language or related languages, if any, be taken into account?

e) What about the number of speakers UBS - Chiang Mai, Mississauga and Midrand criteria vs. SIL criteria

6. WHICH?

a) Which media?
   i) Print Book, Comics, Braille
   ii) Audio/Visual - Audio, Musical, Visual, Audio-visual, Multi-media

b) Which formats

c) Question of cost and affordability

Transmediatization

a) Pros and Cons

b) Gains and Losses

c) Criteria for evaluating faithfulness/fidelity

7. HOW?

a) Literalist approaches (formal correspondence)

b) Dynamic equivalent/ Functional equivalent approaches (Meaning-based)

c) Functionalist approaches

d) Literary & text linguistic approaches

e) Domestication and Foreignization perspectives

A SUGGESTED BASIC READING LIST

1. Eugene Nida & C. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation.*
2. Eugene Nida & Jan de Waard, *From One Language To Another.*
3. J. Beekman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God.*
4. Mildred Larson, *Meaning-Based Translation - A Guide to cross-language equivalence.*
5. E.H. Robertson, *Taking the Word to the World - 50 years of the UBS.*
6. William Smalley, *Translation As Mission.*
7. Philip Stine, ed., *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church.*
8. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message.*
9. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History.*
10. Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader.*
11. David Katan, *Translating Cultures.*
12. Mona Baker, ed. *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies.*
13. Mark Shuttleworth, *Dictionary of Translation Studies.*
14. Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies theories and application.*
15. Basil Hatim, *Teaching and Researching Translation.*
16. Robert Hodgson and Paul Soukoup, *From One Medium to Another.*
17. Robert Hodgson & Paul Soukoup, *Fidelity and Translation.*
18. Julian Sundersingh, *Audio-based Translation.*
19. Tim Wilt, ed. *Bible Translation Frames of Reference.*
20. J.A. Naude & C.H.J. van der Merwe, eds. *Contemporary Translation Studies and Bible Translation.*