

A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF NEW
LITERARY CRITICAL APPROACHES ON
TRANSLATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE STORY OF
ISAAC'S FAMILY

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DECLARATION

This Dissertation is a product of my own work and is not the result of anything done in collaboration.

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David Kenneth Holford Gray

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyses Robert Alter's translation of Genesis as an example of New Literary Critical Approaches to the text in general, and to Bible Translation in particular. By way of introduction various theoretical approaches to Bible Translation are studied; Functional Equivalence, Relevance Theory and Literary as well as a brief comparison of Formal Correspondence and Functional Equivalence. Relevance Theory is mainly studied from a literary perspective. The study then looks at Alter's attitude to the narrative, and his translation principles before a more detailed analysis of the Jacob story as Alter has represented it is carried out. His translation is analysed according to the principles of Functional Equivalence, Relevance Theory and New Literary Critical Approaches before coming to a conclusion on his work and some comments are made as to its usefulness for the Bible Translation world in general.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
BBE	The Bible in Basic English
BDB	Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
CEV	Contemporary English Version
cf.	compare with
DE	Dynamic Equivalence
ESV	English Standard Version
FC	Formal Correspondence
FE	Functional Equivalence
GNB (TEV)	Good News Bible (Today's English Version)
Hi.	hiphil
I-based	Inference-based translations (receptor-focused)
JOTT	Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (Supplement Series)
LB	Living Bible
LiFE	Literary Functional Equivalent translations
MT	Mother-tongue (speaker of a language)
NET	The Net Bible
Ni.	niphal
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLC	New Literary Critical
NLCA	New Literary Critical Approach(es)
NLT	New Living Translation
NRS	New Revised Standard version
OT	Old Testament
Pi.	piel
REB	Revised English Bible
RL	Receptor Language
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RT	Relevance Theory
S-based	Stimulus-based translations (text-based)
SL	Source Language
Tanakh (NJV)	Tanakh (New Jewish Version) – Jewish Publication Society
TE	Translation Equivalent
TL	Target Language
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TW	Translator's Workplace CD
UBS	United Bible Societies

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

For here I am now. It's like I am standing at the doorway, strongly-requesting to be admitted. For whoever will respond, who will open his door and have me come in, there won't be any disturbance/hindrance to our(excl., i.e. his and my) fellowship.

Rev 3:20¹

Anyone who has undertaken Bible Translation will at some point have asked the question “what makes a good translation?” Given the huge historical and cultural gap between the Ancient Near East (ANE) and the modern world, how is a translator, let alone a modern reader, to infer the correct sense of the biblical texts? Some prefer “literal” translations others “dynamic” translations, but what do these terms actually mean? And if we know what is meant by “literal” translations, what then is a “literary” translation?

This study looks at the issues relating to these questions that are currently being discussed by the Bible Translation fraternity. Starting with the role of Dynamic Equivalence translations, it then considers the study New Literary Critical Approaches and their potential for taking the Bible Translation debate further. The “literary” translation of Genesis into English by Robert Alter, and comments on the narrative by other proponents of NLCAs, have provided ample material for discussing the impact of these approaches on Bible Translation as a whole. Since the story of Isaac’s Family (principally Jacob) can be taken as a literary unit, I have used that as a text corpus. I have also considered the impact of Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory on Bible translation.

The debate between “dynamic” (Functionally Equivalent) and “literal” (Formal Correspondence) translation theories is better expressed as a tension between *receptor-focused* and *text-based* translations, as Christoph Unger has pointed out.² I have followed his distinction, rather than the traditional FE vs. FC one. Alter’s translation broadly fits into the text-based category.

The Bible has been translated for centuries. The first Bible Translation was the Septuagint – a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Since then Latin, German, English and many other languages have received Bible translations. Most of these followed a formal

¹ Back-translated from Tagbanwa – Translator’s Workplace (TW) CD, Version 4

² Christoph Unger notes that FE is not an independent parameter when examining types of translations. Instead he distinguishes between stimulus-based (text-based) and inference-based (receptor-focused) translations. Unger, ‘Literary form, communicative clues and realism in translation’ – paper given at BT conference Jan. 2006, European Training Programme, UK.

correspondence approach where the translation was carried out as word-for-word as possible, then the word order was modified to reach an approximation to a natural text. In doing this words often had to be supplied (e.g. the indefinite article in English), or occasionally ignored (e.g. the Greek particle $\delta\epsilon$, the Hebrew particle וְ in poetry), but these were some of the few compromises allowed by translators. Hebraisms such as “slow to anger” or “and it came to pass” appeared in the translation, and sometimes crept into the language itself.

More recently Eugene Nida, firstly of SIL,³ then a UBS translation consultant and theorist, proposed a new theory of translation known as *Dynamic Equivalence*⁴ or *The Code Model*. His experience of working with first-Bible projects for minority language groups moulded his ideas. How does one translate Rev 3:20 for a culture where they live on houses on stilts, with verandas but lacking doors?⁵ His theory of translation, which attempts to cope with such situations, and also the development of it by others among the translation fraternity, is outlined below.

³ SIL International, registered in Dallas

⁴ A term which he later rejected for *Functional Equivalence*, partly due to the misapplication of the description DE to paraphrases such as the Living Bible.

⁵ “Door” can easily be translated “opening” or “entrance,” but how does one translate the verb “to knock” if there is nothing to knock *on*? E.g. clearing one’s throat might be the culturally appropriate way to announce one’s presence at the door. There are countless other examples – cultures that lack a word for “sheep,” or “altar.” Solutions to these problems are far from easy – words have to be borrowed, invented, or expanded into phrases (e.g. “sacrifice-platform” for altar).

Chapter 2

RECEPTOR-FOCUSED TRANSLATIONS

The Dynamic Equivalence (DE) model of translation dates back to Nida's "Code Model," which showed how translation from one language to another works in practice.

THE CODE MODEL (DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE)

Eugene Nida proposed that the process of translation can be broken into two stages: analysis and restructuring.⁶

Diagrammatically we have:

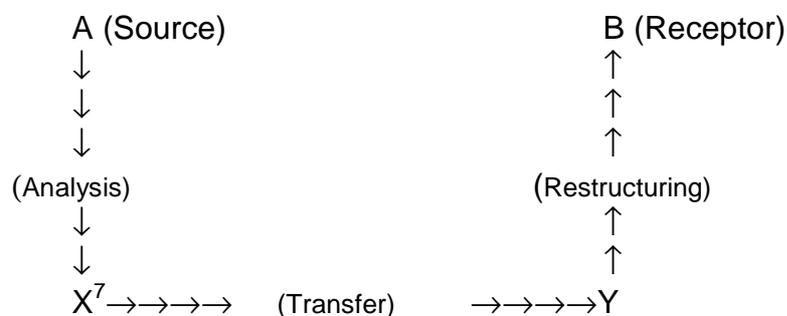


FIGURE 1 – THE CODE MODEL

i.e. The intention being that the meaning of the source, not the form, is transferred.

Nida also proposed that:

1. Each language has its own genius.
2. To communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language.
3. Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the language.
4. To preserve the content of the message *the form must be changed*.⁸ (emphasis mine)

⁶ Actually he originally had three, but the first was preparatory: "...(1) analysis of the respective languages, source and receptor; (2) careful study of the source-language text; and (3) determination of the appropriate equivalent." Nida, Eugene A. *Towards a Science of Translating, With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1964, p241. Note that he focused on *linguistic* differences.

⁷ "The letter X... [and presumably Y] stands for any intermediate structure which may have been set up as a kind of universal structure to which any and all languages might be related for more economic transfer." Nida, Eugene A. and Taber, C. R. *The Theory and Practice of Translation* 1969, revised 1974, p3. The whole figure has been taken from their book.

⁸ Nida and Taber *ibid.* p3-5

These assumptions are foundational to DE translation, which has been the main paradigm of translation since first proposed. It is interesting to note that Nida drew on a wide range of disciplines,⁹ but mainly from the field of theoretical linguistics. Influences on him were Federov, and also de Saussure,¹⁰ Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, Bloomfield, Martinet, Firth, Mounin, Güttinger, Harris and Chomsky. To these Pike, Lamb and Gleason should be added: “With regard to Bible translation Nida has pointed to three principal theories about language structure which have been significant: tagmemics [Pike], stratificational grammar [Lamb and Gleason] and generative-transformational grammar [Chomsky].”¹¹ Chomsky’s theory labelled the grammar as “surface structure” and semantics as “deep structure,” but his model failed to take account of the influence of form over meaning. In his own words, “...the Standard Theory... was questioned from the very beginning. ...it was noted in the book itself... that at least some aspects of semantic representation, for example those related to topic and comment, seem to involve surface structure rather than deep structure.”¹² In addition the deep structure failed to predict the surface structure in many cases. This gave rise to the idea of “skewing,” a label applied when the grammatical form and the semantics of a word or phrase do not match, for example:

“Don’t you think it is getting rather cold in here now?”

(i.e. “Please shut the door or window!”)

The lack of explanation in linguistic terms for both these problems prompted a paradigm-shift in linguistics as the role of various pragmatic approaches came to the fore. One of these is Relevance Theory, which concentrates on the role of *inference* in dialogue, and which I look at in Chapter 3.

Nida’s theory of DE translation has had such an impact that it is discussed in books on general translation studies as well as in the world of Bible translation.¹³

Proponents of DE in translation go beyond discussing understanding the message to discussing how receptors “feel” the impact of the translation:

⁹ “linguistics, literary criticism, ethnography, communication theory, machine translation, psychology and philosophy” – Anthony Howard Nichols *Translating the Bible – A Critical Analysis of E. A. Nida’s Theory of Dynamic Equivalence and its Impact Upon Recent Bible Translations*. PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, November 1996, p30

¹⁰ For instance he talked about “...’the arbitrary nature of the sign.’ By this he means that the relationship between the signifier and signified in language is never necessary (or ‘motivated’): one could just as easily find the sound signifier *arbre* as the signifier *tree* to unite with the concept ‘tree’.” Ronald Shleifer, *Saussure, Ferdinand de*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/ferdinand_de_saussure.html accessed 10th May 2006. This structuralist view of language clearly forms the basis of Nida’s theory that the meaning is more significant than the form.

¹¹ Nichols *op. cit.* p32

¹² Noam Chomsky *Language and Responsibility - Based on Conversations with Mitsou Ronat*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1977 Translated from the French by John Viertel, 1979, p150-151. The book he mentions is his *Aspects*, published in 1964.

¹³ E.g. Bassnett, Susan *Translation Studies* Routledge, NY, Third edition 2002 & 2003, pp22-30

“Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language *respond* to it *in substantially the same manner* as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose.

It would be wrong to think, however, that the response of the receptors in the second language is merely in terms of comprehension of the information, for communication is not merely informative. It must also be *expressive and imperative* if it is to serve the principal purposes of communications such as those found in the Bible. That is to say, a translation of the Bible must not only provide information which people can understand but must present the message in such a way that people can feel *its relevance* (the expressive element in communication) and can then *respond to it in action* (the imperative function).¹⁴ (emphasis mine)

This is where the description “Functional Equivalence” comes from – the translator is supposed to determine the most likely emotive impact of the original communication on the first hearers of it and then translate the passage in such a way that the RL audience “feels” the same impact. Nida also switched from using DE to *Functional Equivalence* to distinguish his model of translation from that of more extreme proponents of DE such as Charles Kraft (see Appendix C, below). A moderate approach to DE translation came from SIL consultants John Beekman and John Callow advocated DE translations that were *accurate, clear, natural, and understandable*.¹⁵

Notice that the focus has moved from the *text*, and its author, to the *audience* and their *response*. This is not to say that DE and FE approaches are akin to the reader-response methods espoused by some biblical scholars. The FE translator still believes that each passage has a message, but that this message needs to be communicated in a way appropriate to its audience. Such receptor-focused approaches have their problems, however, especially in the area of inference and implicit information.

IMPLICIT INFORMATION

One of the main differences between FC and FE translations¹⁶ is their approach to the problem of information implicit in the text that would have been understood by the original audience, but may be missed by the RL community. Traditionally FE has encouraged the inclusion of explicatures in a translation in order to convey this missing information. These, may be forced by linguistic reasons e.g. consider the passive phrase **וְגַם-בְּרִיךְ יְהוָה** (27:33) “also he will be blessed.” In a RL lacking a passive verb form it would need to be translated “and bless him God will!” In addition, if the audience are considered unlikely to be able to understand an episode on other grounds such as lack of biblical background, some experts encourage translators to explicate the information implicit in the text. For example

¹⁴ Eugene A. Nida and C. R. Taber *The Theory and Practice of Translation* 1969, p24

¹⁵ But anyone who has tried to translate from one language to another will have found out that the three aims of accurateness, naturalness and clarity are in tension, especially the poles *accuracy – naturalness* and *accuracy – clarity*. How is a translator to know where on the line to pitch his or her translation?

¹⁶ See Appendix A for two tables showing the spectrum of English translations.

SIL translation consultants Tim Farrell and Richard Hoyle have suggested adding the sentence “Because of his leprosy he was ritually unclean and an untouchable”¹⁷ to Mark 5:12. Use of explicatures has been controversial, as in some cases it has virtually doubled the length of Bible translations. The most radical solution to this problem so far is Ellis Deibler’s *An Index of Implicit Information in the New Testament*, which lists all the explicatures that *might* be made, should they be required, with a rationale for each.¹⁸ See Appendix B for an example.

This topic brings us onto the idea of inference, a topic which is key to Relevance Theory (see Chapter 3).

“No simple answers are available, no “three easy steps” to a solution can be provided, but it is possible to provide guidelines so that the translator will avoid the two extremes of making *too little* explicit — thus leaving his readers fumbling in the dark or **drawing false inferences** — or of making *too much* explicit, so that every verse reads like a commentary and not a translation” (bolding mine).¹⁹

The reader will draw inferences from the text, based on their own cultural and life experience, and on the immediate context of the narrative. Thus, it is argued, if the inferences drawn are likely to be false, it is better to explicate the true inference. The issue of how much to simplify²⁰ or expand the translation has plagued translators for centuries. Some criterion is necessary.

A more concrete view on what can legitimately be explicated came from Beekman and Callow. They encouraged the use of explicatures where necessary in order to achieve the goal of clarity (and accuracy in terms of the *message* rather than the form):

Implicit information

“...may be expressed explicitly if, and only if, the RL necessitates it. It is not expressed explicitly merely because the translator thinks it would be helpful, or because of his own doctrinal convictions or denominational views, or because some other translator has done so, or because he thinks this is something the RL readers really need to know. It is made explicit because the grammar, or the meanings, or the dynamics of the RL require it in order that the information conveyed will be the same as that conveyed to the original readers.”²¹

¹⁷ Farrell, Tim and Hoyle, Richard *Translating Implicit Information in the Light of Saussurean, Relevance, and Cognitive Theories* Notes on Translation Vol. 9 No. 1, 1995, SIL, Dallas, p1-15 and on TW. See Appendix F for their rationale.

¹⁸ The proposals are, in general, more radical than those found in UBS handbooks, but Deibler’s does explain that they are only potential needs for explicature i.e. in many cases the RL and culture will tolerate and understand the implicature well enough for the translator to be able to represent the SL as it is, without making the implied information explicit. More recently he has suggested producing an English Bible for MT translators containing all these explicatures in italics.

¹⁹ Beekman and Callow, *op. cit.* on TW CD

²⁰ E.g in GNB 17:14; 31:42.

²¹ Beekman and Callow, *op. cit.* on TW CD. To the above list above one might add “or because it is suggested in the Translator’s Handbook,” which too often provides a range of translation solutions without providing the translator with criteria by which he or she might choose from them.

Nida and Taber also provided one rule of thumb for when it is advisable to make information explicit:

“...one may make explicit in the text only what is *linguistically* implicit in the immediate context of the problematic passage. This imposes a dual restraint: one may not simply add interesting cultural information which is not actually present in the meanings of the terms used in the passage, and one may not add information derived from other parts of the Bible, much less from extra-Biblical sources, such as tradition”²²

The problem with explaining terms in the text, they argue, is that it is possible to give the term an understanding which relies on false or biased exegesis. Some examples Nida gives illustrate legitimate explicatures: “field of blood” may need expanding to “field where blood was spilled” and “God of peace” to “God who gives peace” or “God who causes peace”,²³ for obvious reasons. This can, however, be taken too far, as it distorts the literary features of the original, and treats the audience as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge (based on theories of the propositional nature of truth), as well as largely ignoring the vital role of Bible expositors and extra-biblical helps.

Beekman and Callow, however, seemed to confuse linguistic and other issues:

“...the approach to translation which is to be preferred is the one which most accurately and naturally transfers the meaning from the original to the RL. The idiomatic approach to translation does this best. It implies that a particular word in the original text may be translated in various ways in the RL version so as to give the most accurate sense and the most natural word combination in each context. The natural order of words, phrases, and clauses is used to convey clearly the meaning of the original text. It is this approach to translation that *reduces ambiguity* and obscurity to a minimum, that makes use of the discourse and stylistic features of the RL in a natural way, and that results in a translation that is clear and understandable so that *even someone who has had little or no contact with Christianity is able to understand the essentials of the message.*”²⁴ (emphasis mine)

A point that Nida also seems to support; “...there needs to be sufficient material presented in the text that it can be understood without recourse to the kinds of supporting material that are often demanded of older translations.”²⁵

This seems overly optimistic. How can a Bible translation *alone* achieve this goal?²⁶

The other main criticism of the theory of FE is that it does not answer the question “...how can the translator know whether or not his translation of the original is functionally equivalent, for example in its flattering effects?”²⁷ Nichols puts the problem well:

²² Nida and Taber *op. cit.* p110. See 4.1 “Gaps” for an example of a translation that violates one of these principles.

²³ Nida *Towards a Science of Translating* p229

²⁴ Beekman, John and Callow, John *Translating The Word of God - with Scripture and Topical Indexes* 1984 by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, USA on TW CD.

²⁵ Nida *Towards a Science of Translating*, p226-240

²⁶ If there is no church, and no one has begun church planting, it is doubtful if one lone Bible-Translation project can carry out linguistic analysis, literacy (where needed), translation, church-planting, and a biblical literacy programme. This is where partnership comes in.

²⁷ Ernst-August Gutt *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2nd Edition 2000 (1st Edition 1991) p50 Also, Gutt points out that if the flattery,

“...‘equivalence’ defined in terms of the receptor’s reactions is impossible to measure, and blurs the distinction between ‘translation’ and ‘communication’...”²⁸ In order to see how a theory of communication can be applied to translation I look at Relevance Theory (Chapter 3, below).

SUMMARY – RECEPTOR-FOCUSED TRANSLATIONS

Since the spectrum of translation from FC to FE is so wide, and all translations are to some extent FE, it makes more sense to talk of *text-based* and *receptor-focused* translations.²⁹ Text-based translations have the aim of representing the effects of the Hebrew, whether using a FE approach or not. Receptor-focused translations aim at communicating the *message* intended by the original author. They are based on the Code Model of translation. But as we have seen, there are several problems with this approach:

1. Chomsky’s distinction between surface-structure (grammar) and deep-structure (semantics) has been shown to be too simplistic, and is now being replaced by various linguistic models that involve pragmatics – the science of communication. One of these is RT (see below).
2. Following on from point 1, Receptor-focused translations assume that there *is* “a message” that the translator can get at, and that it is possible to isolate this message from the form of the text. This is a false assumption. Literary forms such as alliteration, metaphor, parallelism and chiasmus influence the communication. On top of this all communication assumes a shared context between the communicator and the one communicated with, so much of the “message” is implicit, and hard to get at using code-model based approaches that tend to explain differences between grammatical form and intended meaning using a catch-all phrase, *semantic skewing*.³⁰
3. Functional Equivalence is impossible to measure.
4. Both Nida and Taber, and Beekman and Callow, felt instinctively that there are some parts of the message that a translator should not change, for instance the historical facts; or add such as information contained elsewhere in the Bible. They lacked a theory to tell them why these restrictions were needed. In short, the Code Model supplied ends (goals), but lacked limits (restrictions). Unfortunately the more zealous of the FE proponents ignored the guidelines provided by the applied translation

for example, were to be preserved in the translation, it might not at the same time be able to preserve other functions of the original.

²⁸ Nichols *op. cit.* p ii

²⁹ There has not been space to cite critics of receptor-focused translations, such as Whang. See Bibliography for more information.

³⁰ E.g. a linguistic course description states that, “Various concepts of prototypes, extensions, and tropes (‘metaphor,’ ‘metonym’) will be critically considered in connection with semantic skewing (e.g., secondary uses of brother or father).”
<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/saa/publications/courseguide/winter/archive/Winter90.cg/ling.html>
accessed 10th May 2006

theorists, and many overly optimistic, highly expanded and/or contextualised translations have been produced as a result. Presumably the translators involved in such projects valued *clarity* and *accuracy* in terms of “the message,” but in aiming to preserve a “message” they frequently miscommunicated, as the translation was too distorted to preserve literary links and other such implicatures. There was also a danger of being influenced by their own theological biases when deciding what “the message” was.

5. Biblical literacy is needed in parallel with Bible translation. For an educated Western audience this might simply take the form of footnotes and introductions. For others a more complex programme needs to be introduced. The FE approach was designed mainly for first-Bible non-literate minority groups, and even there it needed modifying to take into account the limits of what could reasonably be achieved by a translation project, especially in an area that lacked a viable church.

To be fair the more moderate receptor-focused approach advocated by Beekman and Callow always realised that extremely dynamic or “free” translations were unhelpful:

“The other unacceptable type is the unduly free translation. Translations may vary widely in style and still be accurate in content. Thus, when a translation is classified as *too free*, this is not a judgment concerning its style but rather *concerning the information it communicates*... In this kind of translation there is no intention to reproduce the linguistic form of the language from which the translation is made. The purpose is to make the message as relevant and clear as possible. There are, therefore, no distortions of the message arising from literalisms, but there are, nevertheless, *distortions of content*, with the translation clearly *saying what the original neither says nor implies*. Thus, although the highly literal and the unduly free translations are at opposite extremes, they share the same unacceptable characteristic of failing to communicate what the original communicated.”³¹ (emphasis mine)

This advice was (unfortunately) unheeded by many receptor-focused translators. It seems, however, that the pendulum is now swinging (away from extreme receptor-focused approaches and) back towards the centre, by focusing more on the text, while at the same time keeping what is good in the receptor-focused approach. The two main influences on this swing are *Relevance Theory* and *Literary Approaches* to translation. I have covered these in the next chapter.

³¹ Beekman and Callow *op. cit.* on TW.

Chapter 3

TEXT-BASED TRANSLATIONS

In this chapter the aim is to study FC, literary, and Relevance-Theory approaches to translation. These are largely text-based, in that they shun the more extreme approaches to implicit information. The most traditional approach is FC:

FORMAL CORRESPONDANCE TRANSLATIONS

The label “Formal Correspondence” is to be preferred over “Literal” as it more accurately describes the process of FC translation.³² Such translations try to keep as close to the Hebrew text as possible, both in terms of word choice and syntax. Some reordering of the sentence is always necessary, but they avoid the use of explicatures, as 15:16 shows:

<i>Original Hebrew + FC Translation</i>	<i>FE Translations</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">וְדֹר רְבִיעִי יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה כִּי לֹא־שָׁלֵם עֲוֹן הָאֱמֹרִי עַד־הֵנָּה :</p> <p>And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. (RSV)</p>	<p>Four generations later, your descendants will return here <i>and take this land</i>, because only then will the people who live here be so sinful <i>that they deserve to be punished</i>. (CEV)</p> <p>Not until the fourth generation will your descendants return here. Sin is still a <i>thriving business</i> among the Amorites. (The Message)</p>

TABLE 1

A COMPARISON OF FC AND FE TRANSLATIONS

Notice that the RSV does not avoid potentially unknown terms such as “iniquity,” nor does it try to explain in what sense the sin of the Amorites is not yet “complete,” and when it might be completed (and what might happen then). The RSV is more clear and accurate at this point, even if it *has* left the ambiguity in place. The temptation to clear up the ambiguity by closing the gap, is, however, quite strong. See Appendix D, Gaps, for an example. Some FE translations use explicatures to solve these problems (CEV). Others try to make the English more natural (The Message). It is hard to imagine what sin being a “thriving business” (The Message) implies, exactly, except that they are very good at it. But this loses the sense of the Hebrew verb **שָׁלֵם**.

Many biblical and literary scholars still prefer the FC method of translation. Ryken, for example, makes the point that all translation is *not* interpretation. It is important to distinguish

³² Of course there is no such thing as a completely “literal” translation.

between *linguistic* and *thematic* interpretation. The former³³ is necessary, the latter,³⁴ according to him, should be avoided.

LITERARY READINGS AND RELEVANCE THEORY

Neither this section nor the next belong wholly in the text-based chapter, as they also borrow enormously from FE. Given that they are at least a corrective to the more extreme examples of FE translation, I have chosen to analyse them here.

Since the Code Model is now evidently too simplistic as a translation model (due to the false distinction between deep and surface structure, and lack of explanation for *skewing*), translators have been searching for an improved model, with a better explanation of the mechanics of communication in general, and translation in particular. In this section I show how Relevance Theory explains how readers interpret “poetic” texts, including narratives. RT is more interested in the cognitive mechanics of the communication than its literary strategy, but I also aim to apply the theory to the issues addressed by literary studies of the narratives. According to RT “utterances (or texts) resemble the thoughts that the speaker or writer intends to communicate, providing clues and blanks to be filled inferentially by the addressee (listener or reader).”³⁵

Relevance Theory as Applied to Oral Communication

Sperber and Wilson developed Grice’s maxims of communication, reducing them³⁶ to one maxim – relevance – consisting of two principles:

- “(1) Human Cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance,
- (2) Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.”³⁷

In other words the addresser says as little as possible while maximising relevant information for the hearer, because they assume a certain commonality of “cognitive environment” i.e. shared knowledge. Meanwhile, the addressee is able to put their own “spin” on what they hear, which explains why they might jump to conclusions if the addresser has not foreseen this “spin.” For example the following sentences could all be relevant, but optimal relevance

³³ Ryken gives the example of whether to translate זרע as “seed” or “offspring.” In certain places, e.g. Gen 3:15 (contrast 16:10), this is quite important, given the Messianic interpretation added by the NT.

³⁴ For instance translating the genitive construction “the righteousness of God” as “righteousness from God,” as does the NIV. This assumes a reformed interpretation of imparted righteousness. Many scholars see it as referring to God’s righteousness. For a biblically-literate audience it is probably best to leave it ambiguous, as per the RSV.

³⁵ Francisco Yus, review of Ian MacKenzie’s “Paradigms of Reading” in *Linguist List* <http://linguistlist.org/issues/14/14-2251.html> accessed 24 Mar 2006

³⁶ Grice’s four maxims were Quality, Quantity, Relevance and Manner.

³⁷ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* Blackwells, Oxford, 2nd Edition 1995 (1st 1986) p260

depends on what the addresser wants to communicate and how much the addressee needs to hear:

“(a) I’ll be out from 4 to 6.

(b) I’ll be out at the Jones’s from 4 to 6.

(c) I’ll be out at the Jones’s from 4 to 6 to discuss the next meeting.”

In order to conform to the 2nd principle of relevance above, the communicator (Mary) will use the shortest of the above sentences which conveys sufficient information to the recipient (Peter). “If he cares where she is going, but not why, she should choose (b). If he cares both where and why, she should choose (c).”³⁸ Otherwise (a) is sufficient. All are potentially relevant, according to the 1st principle of relevance, but only one will be optimally relevant according to the 2nd.

Any speaker aims for optimal relevance, according to Sperber and Wilson. This means that he utilizes the contextual effects to their maximum when communicating, using minimal effort. Therefore there is usually a high level of inference, making use of the recipient’s *cognitive environment*. Take for example, the advert for a T-shirt seen in a Christian Book Distributors’ catalogue:³⁹

‘SOUL SURVIVOR. *Trust Jesus. Live forever. Soul survivor. No one gets voted out of paradise.*’

The advert is obviously aimed at young people, who would know that *Soul Survivor* is a Christian worship event. It assumes that the same audience watch TV, and know the programmes such as *The Missing Link* where each round the contestants vote out one of their competitors. Without those two vital pieces of contextual information the advert is meaningless – why would anyone get voted out of paradise, what is “Soul Survivor”?⁴⁰

Relevance Theory explains why so much of our communication has a high level of implicit information. For example the conversation:

David: “Richard was out.”

Georgina: “I’ll try again later.”

The context was a telephone call that David had volunteered to make to Richard that morning. In addition Georgina knew that David was shortly off to the University. Both speakers conveyed the maximum amount of information with the minimum of effort. It also explains “skewing” between grammatical form and intended meaning. Expressions such as

³⁸ Sperber and Wilson *ibid.* p269

³⁹ www.christianbook.com

⁴⁰ One example Gutt cited at the ETP-UK translation conference, 2006 was a parent asking their daughter “What’s your new teacher like?” The daughter replies, “He rides to school on a motorbike!” To a Western audience the implication is obvious – the teacher is “cool.” To some Türkmen women the same example implied that the teacher was “poor.”

“Yeah right!” and “Kill! Bart!”⁴¹ can only be understood in context. The first is lexically and grammatically positive, but the speaker intends a negative meaning, whereas the second is the other way around.

Relevance Theory and Translation – Gutt and Van Leeuwen

Relevance theory is a theory of communication and does not tell us how to carry out translation, as such:

“Since coding-decoding processes are only part of the communication act, any attempt to convey the entire message of the Bible by means of linguistic coding is doomed to failure. This... is the fundamental weakness of functional equivalence.”⁴²

It seems that a translation on its own is incapable of closing the contextual gap between the original audience and the RL audience. RT does not tell translators how to translate, but it does explain what is going on in cause-and-effect terms, and it also shows the limits of what translation can achieve.

Gutt has recommended that Bible translators aim for “direct” translation. This is analogous to direct, as opposed to indirect, quoting of speech.⁴³ Indirect translations are analogous to indirect speech, and may contain explicatures. There are dangers in having too many of these, as according to Relevance Theory the explicature can change the focus of the phrase. Gutt points out the danger of such expansions:

“For example, even the little additions, like ‘people called Pharisees’ and ‘river Jordan’ communicate to the reader that the people and places were probably unknown to the original readers, since the writer explained the names to them.”⁴⁴

In Relevance Theory terms, is the translator aiming for optimal relevance in retelling what he finds in the biblical text for his audience? Or is he, rather, recognizing the relevance of the text to the original receptors, and simply trying to *represent* it? The former option has the translator taking on the mantle of the author, to some extent, and is therefore dangerous when dealing with revealed scripture. The latter, though it may not produce a text of remarkable communicability *in and of itself*, is a much safer option. This is not to say that Gutt’s use of relevance theory necessarily promotes literal⁴⁵ translation. Rather it promotes more careful FE translation, faithful to the original, with a recognition of the limits of this translated text, and the degree of functional equivalence *depending on the audience*.

⁴¹ The Simpsons (contrasted with “Kill Bart!”), or Ian MacKenzie cites US-Army style (positive) use of “Son-of-a-bitch!” *Paradigms of Reading: Relevance Theory and Deconstruction*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2002, p88.

⁴² Kevin Gary Smith *Bible Translation and Relevance Theory - The Translation of Titus* a Dissertation Submitted for the degree of *Doctor Litterarum* at the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa) December 2000

⁴³ “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).” Gutt uses “presumes,” as, in his own words, “It seems crucial for translation that the receptor-language text be, in fact, presented as the representation of the original.” Gutt, Ernst-August *Relevance Theory – A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*, SIL and UBS, Dallas and New York, 1992, p66

⁴⁴ Gutt *op. cit.* p72

⁴⁵ See *Introduction* to this chapter, above.

“Relevance theory covers the whole range of interlingual interpretive use, from full resemblance to very little or no resemblance at all. In each case communicative success will depend on consistency with the principle of relevance, which comes across as a presumption of faithfulness, that is, a presumption of close enough resemblance with the original in relevant respects.”⁴⁶

The translation of the text *in and of itself*, will never be optimally relevant⁴⁷ to modern receptors:

“This cause-effect nature of communication means that the first question in translation is not what we *want* to communicate by our translation but what we reasonably *can* communicate. In other words, translators need to address the issue of *communicability* squarely, which has been largely ignored. Normative statements about the objective of translation made in ignorance of this condition are not helpful and only create frustration.”⁴⁸

Having realised the limits of Bible translation, translators need to partner with others to see biblical-literacy programmes put in place (where they do not currently exist), as well as working closely with Bible-expositors to see what kind of a translation they would like to *use*. These programmes seek to close the gap between the biblical world-view or cognitive environment, and that of the RL community. Alter’s translation has built-in teaching tools (see Chapter 4).

Is optimal relevance a warranted goal for a Bible Translation? Those advocating FE translations take for granted that the translation should be at least as relevant as the SL text was to its audience, but those following a more traditional style of translation would want to be more faithful to the text, at the expense of relevance. One such person is Raymond Van Leeuwen. He has also applied RT to Bible Translation,⁴⁹ coming up with a slightly different conclusion:

“I am arguing for a type of translation that is more consistently *transparent* (a term I prefer to ‘literal’), so that the original shines through it, to the extent permitted by the target language. A translator must, in a learned and aesthetically appropriate way, use the resources of the target language so as to maximally capture the details of the original, even if there is some increase in processing effort required on the part of the readers with regard to the Bible’s ‘foreign’ expressions and images.”⁵⁰

In conclusion then, both Gutt and Van Leeuwen agree that keeping the style of the original, as much as possible, is a laudable aim, even if the RL community are going to need help understanding the Bible in its “direct” or “transparent” form. There is also the issue of the

⁴⁶ Gutt, *op. cit.* p66

⁴⁷ The phrase optimally relevant is used in a technical sense, as defined by Sperber and Wilson (see 5.1 above) or, as explained by Gutt, “...the hearer has the right to assume that the first interpretation he arrives at that a rational speaker might have expected (a) to yield adequate contextual effects, *and* (b) to put the hearer to no unjustifiable processing effort in obtaining those effects is the interpretation intended by the communicator.” Gutt, *Translation and Relevance; Cognition and Context* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2nd Edition 2000 (1st Edition 1991), p32.

⁴⁸ Gutt, *op. cit.* p67. For some “normative statements” on Bible translation see above on Receptor-focused translations, chapter 2.

⁴⁹ Presumably for literate Western audiences.

⁵⁰ Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “On Bible Translation and Hermeneutics,” in *After Pentecost – Language and Biblical Interpretation* Ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Möller, Paternoster and Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001, p287

expectations of the audience. If the audience is expecting a translation that reflects, to some degree, the form of the original, they will be disappointed if they receive an indirect, expansive translation.⁵¹

Some proponents of RT tend to carry out fairly direct translations with copious use of footnotes.⁵² They are, perhaps, reacting against more expansive examples of FE e.g. the CEV in Jdg 15:15 below:

Hebrew	RSV	CEV	NLT
וַיִּמְצֵא לְחֵי-תְמוֹר טָרִיף וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחֶהּ וַיִּדְבֶּקֶת אֵלָּהּ אִישׁ:	Coming across the <u>fresh</u> jawbone of a donkey, he reached out and snatched it up; and with it he slaughtered a thousand men.	Samson glanced around and spotted the jawbone of a donkey. <u>The jawbone had not yet dried out, so it was still hard and heavy.</u> Samson grabbed it and started hitting Philistines—he killed a thousand of them!	Then he picked up a donkey's jawbone that was lying on the ground and killed a thousand Philistines with it.

(emphasis mine)

TABLE 2

JDG 15:15 IN THE CEV AS AN EXAMPLE OF AN EXPANSIVE TRANSLATION

RSV simply translates טָרִיף as “fresh,” a word that means little in the context. The NLT has simplified the translation, by omitting the word altogether, perhaps on the basis of relevance, or, rather, lack of it. CEV has explained the meaning of the term within the text by adding a whole sentence. This may seem justified on the basis of the Code Model, with its focus on “the message” as the audience need to hear it. Both Relevance and NLCA theorists agree, however, in saying that such explicatures tend to distort the translation. Relevance Theory explains this distortion in terms of miscommunication – if the processing effort outweighs the benefit, then it may be better to leave information out, as per the NLT, rather than explain it in the text. There are stylistic reasons, too, why explanatory sense should not be added. They cause a loss of the literary features of the Hebrew narrative.⁵³ Literary features and

⁵¹ Even in the case of minority languages, unless the people group are isolated they are likely to be aware of a Bible translation in a language of wider communication. A comparison of the two translations will invariably illicit the question, “Where does all this extra information come from?”

⁵² See, for example, Kevin Gary Smith’s *Bible Translation and Relevance Theory - The Translation of Titus* a Dissertation Submitted for the degree of ‘Doctor Litterarum’ at the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa) December 2000, though copious use of footnotes is not by any means the only possible application of relevance theory to Bible translation. Some kind of biblical literacy programme is necessary, however.

⁵³ They would not, however, countenance the idea of omitting the TE of טָרִיף, as this would also contribute to a loss of literary features such as plays on words.

poetic effects, even of sections of the Bible that are largely written in prose, need to be kept wherever possible. If translators are not even aware of them, they will inevitably be lost.

Relevance Theory and Poetic Effects

Relevance Theory explains communication in cause and effect terms. It has mostly been applied to oral dialogue, but recently scholars have begun to apply it to literary forms, including poetry. Ian MacKenzie and Adrian Pilkington have applied Relevance Theory to forms such as metaphor⁵⁴ and irony. Their analysis has a useful point for Bible Translators: that literary forms are lost at our peril. MacKenzie points out that the processing effort for metaphorical language is probably no greater than for literal.⁵⁵ Pilkington, on the other hand, agrees with Van Leeuwen that the increase in contextual effects are worthwhile *even if* the processing effort is greater.⁵⁶ Under the Receptor-Focused model, if a metaphor did not translate across cultural boundaries Beekman and Callow encouraged translators to use a simile instead or re-express the metaphor in non-figurative language.⁵⁷ According to the Code Model, with its focus on “the message,” one method seemed almost as good as the other.⁵⁸ But RT helps us see that the communication actually works better when the literary form is kept, if at all possible, because the *poetic effects* are preserved. Adrian Pilkington shows that the three lines of Shakespeare’s poetry:

“A thing slipp’d idly from me
Our poem is a gum which oozes
From whence ‘tis nourished.”

Has a “flood of meanings and associations!” These include, in his own words:

- a. The poem doesn’t belong to the poet (any more).
- b. The poem has a life of its own.
- c. The poem produced itself.
- d. The poem happened (almost) accidentally.
- e. The poem’s origin is mysterious.
- f. The poem is momentary in its occurrence.
- g. The poem involves an unleashing of energy.
- h. The words came very fluently.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Some types of metaphor are so embedded in a language that they become part of the world view. George Lakoff, in *Metaphors We Live By*, has described how certain ideas such as “up is good,” “down is bad” are endemic in many language – they have been absorbed into the cognitive environment of the language speakers.

⁵⁵ Ian MacKenzie *Paradigms of Reading: Relevance Theory and Deconstruction*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2002, p97

⁵⁶ Adrian Pilkington *Poetic Effects – A Relevance Theory Perspective*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2000, p124

⁵⁷ “The third possibility open to the translator is to give the meaning of the original figure in a non-figurative form. Within this possibility, the translator may choose to retain the image used in the original, or he may not.” Beekman and Callow *op. cit.* Chapter 9, on TW.

⁵⁸ A careful reading of Nida and Taber, Barnwell or Beekman and Callow show that they preferred to keep the form *if possible*, though they lacked a rationale for doing so.

⁵⁹ Adrian Pilkington ‘The Literary Reading Process: A Relevance Theory Perspective.’ In *Empirical Studies of Literature: Proceedings of the Second IGEL-Conference, Amsterdam*

It would be difficult to translate this poetry in such a way as to keep all these strong and weak implicatures, but translators try to be aware of them, while refraining from turning the poetry into bald prose. Far from treating readers as empty vessels that need to be filled with knowledge, RT allows them to bring their own world-view, and the willingness to put in some effort to both adapt to the one behind the text *and* process the poetic language. "...readers of literature will normally be willing to devote some additional mental resources in order to access a wider array of weak implicatures because the *sensations obtained offset the cognitive effort required in exchange*, regardless of whether these are intended by the writer or not."⁶⁰ (emphasis mine) In other words there will be emotional benefit in reading the translation. If that is true of reading Shakespeare, how much more will it be true of reading the Bible?

This brings us back to Alter, and his artistic-poetic translation of Genesis, which I look at below. Firstly I cover Wendland's LiFE translations.

1989 Ed. Elrud Ibsch, Dick Schram, Gerard Steen. Rodeoppi B.V. Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA 1991 p122. The Shakespeare quote is from *Timon of Athens*.

⁶⁰ Francisco Yus, review of Ian MacKenzie's 'Paradigms of Reading' in Linguist List <http://linguistlist.org/issues/14/14-2251.html> accessed 24 Mar 2006. We can't know for certain if the writer intended certain sensations, but we *can* know, at least to a large degree, if the translation represents the text.

LITERARY FUNCTIONAL-EQUIVALENT TRANSLATIONS

Ernst Wendland, a UBS consultant based in Zambia, has proposed that Bible translators carry out *literary-rhetorical* or *literary functional-equivalent* translations. These attempt to convey the beauty of the original, as well as having the same impact. They are:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| a) | <i>the mediated re-composition of</i> | [the translator acting as a conceptual bridge between two texts and contexts] |
| b) | <i>one contextually framed text</i> | [context-sensitive: linguistically, socio-culturally, institutionally, situationally] |
| c) | <i>within a different communication setting</i> | [the negotiated exchange of a verbal message in a new language + mind-set] |
| d) | <i>in the most relevant</i> | [the most cognitive-emotive-volitional effects with the least processing effort] |
| e) | <i>functionally equivalent manner possible,</i> | [an acceptable, appropriate, and appreciable degree of similarity in terms of the meaning variables of |
| f) | <i>that is, stylistically marked, more or less</i> | pragmatic intent and semantic content as well as textual-stylistic form] |
| g) | <i>in keeping with the designated Brief</i> | [specific <i>Skopos</i> aims, available resources, target audience, medium, etc.] |
| h) | <i>of the TL project concerned</i> | [the overall communicative framework of the TL setting being determined] ⁶¹ |

The *Skopos* of a project consists of the sum of the extra-linguistic factors that influence the translation. These include the baggage, both helpful and unhelpful, that the community of readers bring to the Bible translation as they approach it. The chosen medium of communication is also a factor here – footnotes are hard to include if the medium is audio-visual.⁶²

Notice that Wendland has kept some aspects of the Receptor-Focused model, but has included many more factors. He mentions pragmatic approaches, especially Relevance Theory under both d) and f). He also includes style and literary form. Kees De Blois, quoted in Wendland, prefers avoiding the use of explicatures, though his motive is rather different from Gutt's:

⁶¹ Ernst R. Wendland *Translating the Literature of Scripture – A Literary-Rhetorical Approach to Bible Translation* SIL International, Dallas, 2004, p85

⁶² Though not impossible. They would normally take the form of a conversation between people listening to the story on the tape or video, including their reactions, questions, and some proposed solutions.

“Verse 1, line 1: ‘Happy the person’ instead of ‘Happy is the person’ is closer to the Hebrew form (no unnecessary explicitation) and functionally more poetic.”⁶³

Rather than minimizing the complexities of the translation task, he outlines in detail all the factors that should influence a translation team as they approach the task, including *Artistry* in relation to scripture, a word obviously culled from NLCAs, especially Robert Alter’s work, to which I now turn my attention.

NEW LITERARY-CRITICAL APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION

One of the main proponents of New Literary Critical Approaches is Robert Alter, whose ground-breaking *The Art of Biblical Narrative* came out in 1981. More recently he has published a translation of Genesis, with lengthy introduction, and copious explanatory footnotes. The latter are called “a commentary”,⁶⁴ and supply much of the information needed to interpret the difficult text. What follows is a brief look at NLCAs, an analysis of Alter’s translation principles, and then an analysis of his translation of the Isaac story itself, with the purpose of finding out how NLCAs can be applied to Bible Translation.

New Literary Critical Approaches

NLCAs to the Bible point to an omniscient narrator who communicates with his audience. “The biblical narrator... divests himself of a personal history and the marks of individual identity in order to assume for the scope of his narrative a godlike comprehensiveness of knowledge that can encompass even God Himself.”⁶⁵ It poses, “the question of the narrative as a functional structure, a means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies.”⁶⁶ It is this view of the coherence of biblical narratives that has led to both “literary” models of translation such as Wendland’s, and literary translations, such as Robert Alter’s (of Genesis). NLC analysts such as Alter, Berlin, Licht and Sternberg are mainly interested in characterisation, point of view (including that of the narrator), mimesis, gaps,

⁶³ Wendland *op. cit.* p409. De Blois (another UBS consultant) is commenting on the new Dutch translation of Psa 1.

⁶⁴ Robert Alter *Genesis – Translation and Commentary* W.W. Norton, New York, London, 1996. He has also published translations of 1&2 Samuel and the whole Pentateuch. A similar approach has been taken in Adele Berlin’s *Commentary on Esther*, though in her case the Hebrew text has been included in parallel with the English translations, which is either NJV or her own. She has many footnotes, but also includes introductions etc.

⁶⁵ Robert Alter *The Art of Biblical Narrative* Basic Books, USA, 1981, p157. If this seems a little over-stated, it might be better to view NLCAs as “a synchronic approach to reading the Bible that limit the potentially destructive affects of diachronic approaches such as source and form criticism” – Adele Berlin *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* Sheffield, Almond, 1981, p20. Meir Sternberg, meanwhile, sees omniscience as working both ways; “...the narrator has free access to the minds (‘hearts’) of his dramatis personae, not excluding God himself...” p84, but; “The very choice to devise an omniscient narrator serves the purpose of staging and glorifying an omniscient God.” p89 in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* Indiana University Press, Bloomington IL. 1985

⁶⁶ Sternberg *op. cit.* p1. Notice the focus on a communicative act rather than on some kind of “message” that can be isolated from the text. This is much more in line with Relevance Theory than Nida’s FE or Code Model.

scenes, and repetition of key phrases and vocabulary.⁶⁷ Most of these have some impact on translation, but Alter is only interested in some, and uses his own terminology.

NLCAs to translation are ultimately a new way of reading the narrative. They are not to be confused with reader-response criticism. Instead they are an inductive approach, where the reader attempts to join the hermeneutical spiral of reading and re-reading the narrative in order to attain more of the benefit of the story, as told by the masterful narrator. Much can be learned from analysing Robert Alter's translation of Genesis, with its helpful commentary in footnotes, and this is what the next section sets out to do.

⁶⁷ Sometimes called "resonance," especially when it occurs cross-book or literary unit.

Chapter 4

AN ANALYSIS OF ROBERT ALTER'S TRANSLATION OF GENESIS

In this section I have analysed Alter's translation of the story of Isaac's family, Gen 25:19-35:29. This is a literary unit, bounded by the **תולדות** formula. The purpose of analysing Alter's translation is to see how Bible Translations might be affected by New Literary Critical Approaches to the Old Testament. All biblical quotes below are taken from Alter's translation of Genesis, unless otherwise stated.

ROBERT ALTER'S TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES

Alter's translation is, in his own words:

'...an experiment in re-presenting the Bible – and, above all, biblical narrative prose – in a language that conveys with some precision the semantic nuances and the lively orchestration of literary effects of the Hebrew and at the same time has stylistic and rhythmic integrity as literary English.'⁶⁸

In other words his aims are to produce:

1. A direct or transparent translation (as per Gutt or Van Leeuwen)
2. Preservation of the literary effects of Hebrew
3. Use of literary English style and rhythm in the translation

It is immediately apparent that he has the same issues troubling the Receptor-Focused proponents with their "accurate, clear and natural"⁶⁹ translations – at least two of his aims are in tension (2 and 3, and sometimes 1 and 3).⁷⁰

He points out that clarity is often the main goal of the philologist, but is wary of this himself. He also mentions the danger of trying to disambiguate the terms of the narrative as this results in a lowest-common-denominator Bible, robbed of its beauty.

"The unacknowledged heresy underlying most modern English versions of the Bible is the use of translation as a vehicle for explaining the Bible instead of representing it in another language, and in the most egregious instances this amounts to explaining away the Bible."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Robert Alter *Genesis – Translation and Commentary* W.W. Norton, New York, London, 1996, p ix, cf. his *The Art of Biblical Narrative* p x.

⁶⁹ Katherine Barnwell *Bible Translation – An Introductory Course For Mother-Tongue Translators*, SIL on TW CD

⁷⁰ Translations are always a compromise. It is impossible to convey all the explicit and implicit information across language and cultural barriers. Ultimately, the only way of conveying the beauty of the biblical Hebrew narratives is to teach students Hebrew to the extent they can appreciate the subtleties of these texts.

⁷¹ Alter *ibid.* p xii

As an example he cites the usual habit of translating זרע (seed) as “offspring, descendants, heirs, progeny, posterity”⁷² when leaving it as seed would preserve word-plays such as זרע meaning semen vs. זרע meaning offspring, both found in 38:9. Laudable as this is in principle, not all word-plays can be preserved in the text, and in many cases the translator is forced to represent them in a footnote, especially where the word-play is between similar-sounding terms e.g. אדם (man) vs. אדמה (soil, earth) in Gen 2:7⁷³ or איש (male man) vs. אשה (woman) in Gen 2:23.

Alter would ideally like to translate concordantly, avoiding “...the modern abomination of elegant synonymous variation...”⁷⁴ The problem is that there are certain terms, such as אדם and נפש that resist such consistency. In these cases Alter finds himself forced to translate according to the context.⁷⁵

“...the Hebrew *nefesh*, which the King James Version, following the Vulgate, often translates as ‘soul,’ refers to the breath of life in the nostrils of a living creature and, by extension, ‘lifeblood’ or simply ‘life,’ and by another slide of association, ‘person’; and it is also used as an intensifying form of the personal pronoun, having roughly the sense of ‘very self.’ In the face of this bewildering diversity of meaning, one is compelled to abandon the admirable principle of lexical consistency and to translate, regretfully, according to immediate context.”⁷⁶

Abstract terms such as נפש are much harder to translate concordantly because of their wide semantic range, which may overlap with several English TEs; I have found the best method to be to use the idea of *frames*⁷⁷ to establish the context in which such a term is used. See the Excurses under *Word Order*, below.

As for Alter’s second aim, of preserving the Hebrew literary features, perhaps his most radical solution is to preserve the *waw* in *waw*-consecutive verb chains by translating it concordantly as “and.” The usual Hebrew syntax is parataxis – a chain of linear verbs, whereas English uses hypotaxis – many subordinate clauses. Rearranging the sentence as modern English gives rise to a problem:

‘...it ignores the fact that parataxis is the essential literary vehicle of biblical narrative; it is the way the ancient Hebrew writers saw the world, linked events in it, artfully ordered it, and narrated it, and one gets a very different world if their syntax is jettisoned.’⁷⁸

⁷² Alter *ibid.* p xiii. Even the RSV does this.

⁷³ Interestingly the RSV does not even footnote this, an omission rectified by the more recent NRS.

⁷⁴ Alter *ibid.* p xxvi

⁷⁵ Alter *ibid.* p xxx

⁷⁶ Alter *op. cit.* p xxix – xxx

⁷⁷ John R. Taylor *Linguistic Categorization – Prototypes in Linguistic Theory* 2nd Edition, OUP, 1995 p83ff

⁷⁸ Alter *ibid.* p xvii

This is a dangerous argument, as James Barr demonstrates:

“The idea that the grammatical structure of a language reflects the thought structure of those speaking it, and that it correspondingly reflects the differences from the thought of those speaking a language with different grammatical structure, has very great difficulties... No one would suppose that the Turks, because they nowhere distinguish gender in their language, not even in the personal pronouns as we do in English, are deficient in the concept of sexual difference...”⁷⁹

It is quite possible to grammatically restructure without losing Hebrew thought.⁸⁰ Another issue Alter discusses is the stylistic level of biblical Hebrew – is it possible to find out whether it was mostly high or low register? He comes to the conclusion that “...the language of biblical narrative in its own time was stylized, decorous, dignified, and readily identified by its audiences as a language of literature, in certain ways distinct from the language of quotidian reality” but that it was also “...not a lofty style, and was certainly neither ornate nor euphemistic.”⁸¹ Some instances of mimesis do, however, seem to lead to some colloquialisms in dialogue, such as Esau’s first speech⁸² in Gen 25. Unfortunately the small size of the corpus of data available to us prevents us from finding out for certain how biblical literature fitted into the general scheme of Hebrew literature or colloquial Hebrew (both of which would have changed over the centuries).

The next sections analyse Alter’s translation according to principles of FE, Literary and NLCAs.

ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE

Is Alter’s translation accurate, clear, and natural?

Accuracy

His translation is mostly quite accurate. It follows the sense of the Hebrew quite closely. There are, however, cases where Alter has been forced to leave his principle of concordant translation of Key Terms (or Words) and Idioms:

The Key Terms⁸³ used in Genesis as a whole, and the Story of Isaac’s family in particular (references in bold) are outlined below. Since Alter aims to translate concordantly wherever possible i.e. one English translation equivalent covers one Hebrew term, I have simply listed such terms in Appendix G. The terms below have been translated according to context. The

⁷⁹ James Barr *The Semantics of Biblical Language* Oxford University Press, London, 1961 p39

⁸⁰ Having said that, if a translator is working from an English source text such as the RSV, yet their mother tongue is one that has a preference for parataxis rather than hypotaxis, it would be a pity for them to follow the hypotactic English rather than follow the paratactic Hebrew base text. See Appendix E for an example.

⁸¹ Alter *op. cit.* p xxv

⁸² Alter *ibid.* p xxiv-xxv cf. Appendix D on *Mimesis*

⁸³ i.e. terms that the translator will want to pay special attention to, due to their significance, or merely the fact that they are repeated

tables are sorted by Hebrew term, unless a phrase has been included, in which case the phrase is listed under its headword.

The following table shows terms that Alter has been forced to translated according to their immediate context:

Key Term translated According to Context	English Gloss	Alter's Translation Equivalents	Comments	Ref. in Gen (bolding = part of the story of Jacob)
אֶרֶץ	land, earth	land, earth, ground; native	e.g. 'fat of the earth,' 'dust of the earth,' 'bow to the ground'; 27:46 'daughters of the land' is rendered 'native girls' (idiomatic, contra. 34:1); 35:16 'distance of land' is rendered 'some distance' ⁸⁴	1:1f, 10ff, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24ff, 28ff; ... 26:1ff, 12, 22; 27:28, 39, 46; 28:4, 12ff; 29:1; 30:25; 31:3, 13, 18; 32:4, 10; 33:3, 18; 34:1f, 10, 21, 30; 35:6, 12, 16, 22; 36:5ff, 16f, 20f, 30f, 34 ...
לְאִים	people	people, nation	'nation' in 27:29	25:23; 27:29
מָלֵא	to fill	to be fulfilled, fill, to be done	re. 'time' 25:24 <> 29:21 & 29:27,28	1:22... 25:24; 26:15; 29:21; 29:27; 29:28...
מְרִמָּה	deceit	in deceit, deceitfully	These both translate בְּמְרִמָּה	27:35; 34:13
נַפְשׁוֹ	soul	solemnly; I; very self; life	chapter 27 'solemnly' surprisingly idiomatic, though Alter does have a footnote explaining the Hebrew. He also footnotes 32:31 'I'; 34:3,8 'very self' but not 35:18 'life'. The latter is an idiom – 'as her nefesh went out' for which he has 'as her life ran out'	1:20,21,24,30; 2:7,19; 9:4,5,5,10,12,15,16; 12:5,13; 14:21; 17:14; 19:17,19,20; 23:8; 27:4,19,25,31; 32:31; 34:3,8; 35:18; 36:6; 37:21; 42:21; 44:30,30; 46:15,18,22,25,26,26,27,27; 49:6
עָבַד	to serve	to be a slave, to serve, to render service	a particularly important Key Term in the light of 25:23 and 27:39-40 ⁸⁵	2:5; 2:15; 3:23; 4:2; 4:12; 14:4; 15:13; 15:14; 25:23; 27:29; 27:40; 29:15, 18, 20, 25, 27, 30, 30:26, 29; 31:6; 41; 49:15

⁸⁴ See comments below

⁸⁵ "Just as Abraham's initiatives (worthy or not) do not facilitate the promise of progeny, and Joseph's elaborate charade is counter-productive in getting the second dream to convert its imagery into reality, so, I would suggest, it is precisely because of Jacob's efforts to secure his destiny as lord that he actually becomes servant." Laurence A. Turner *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* JSOT, Sheffield, 1990, p179

עֶבֶד	servant; slave	servant; slave	<i>depending on referent (e.g. Jacob vs. the slaves he owned)</i>	9:25; 9:26... 26:15,19,24,25,32; 27:37; 30:43; 32:5,6,11,17,19,21; 33:5; 33:14; ... 50:18
עַם	nation, people	people; folk (34:16, 22); kin (35:29)	<i>people unless otherwise marked</i>	11:6; 14:16; 17:14, 16; 19:4; 23:7, 11ff; 25:8, 17; 26:10f; 27:29; 28:3; 32:8; 33:15; 34:16, 22; 35:6, 29; 41:40, 55; 42:6; 47:21, 23; 48:4, 19; 49:10, 16, 29, 33; 50:20
צִוָּה	to command	to command, charge		2:16; 3:11,17; 6:22; 7:5,9,16; 12:20; 18:19; 21:4; 26:11; 27:8; 28:1,6; 32:5,18,20; 42:25; 44:1; 45:19; 47:11; 49:29,33; 50:2,12,16,16
שָׁכַן	to dwell, settle	to range, to stay, to settle		3:24; 9:27; 14:13; 16:12; 25:18; 26:2; 35:22; 49:13

TABLE 3

TERMS TRANSLATED FLEXIBLY

Most of the terms have a wide semantic range,⁸⁶ so translating them concordantly would have given rise to quite unnatural translations. Not only that, the translation would have lost the sense of the original, and would therefore have been unclear and possibly even inaccurate.

There are places, however, where Alter could have been more consistent in translating set phrases or idioms according to their context:

Terms translated inconsistently: לְאָם, עַם, גּוֹי – these seem to be translated “nation,” “people” or “folk” almost at random. Only גּוֹי is translated concordantly as “nation.” It is likely that לְאָם is a poetic term, and it only occurs four times overall in Genesis, in two verses. It is a pity, therefore, that Alter did not translate it concordantly. The more common גּוֹי and עַם do seem to have a wide semantic overlap, so it is hard to see how Alter could have done otherwise, unless he had analysed them according to their frame of use (see Excurses, below).

Phrases translated inconsistently: 27:46 מִבְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ – literally “from daughters of the land” is rendered “from the native girls,” also idiomatic, whereas 34:1 has “among the daughters of the land” for the similar בְּבָנוֹת הָאָרֶץ. Both phrases should have included either “daughters of the land” or “native girls.”

Idioms or Phrases translated consistently, or occurring only once:

35:18 וַיֵּהָרֵג בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ – as her *nefesh* went out – for which Alter has “as her life ran out” – quite an idiomatic translation, though this is no bad thing. See Excurses on Frames, below

35:16 כְּבֵרֶת־הָאָרֶץ – distance of land – is rendered “some distance,” though with a footnote pointing out that an Akkadian cognate, *beru*, may well be related to the Hebrew בְּרֵה (part of כְּבֵרֶה), which is an ancient mile (about four and a half English miles). Wenham translates it as “about two hours distance”⁸⁷ or roughly seven miles. Westermann has “as far as a horse can run.”⁸⁸ The LXX has *χαβραθα* – a transliteration of the Hebrew.

⁸⁶ A term with a wide semantic range is bound to be translated using several equivalents, unless the RL term happens to have exactly the same wide semantic range, which is unlikely. More often than not the Hebrew term and its proposed translation equivalent overlap, semantically, to some extent, but other translation equivalents are needed for the areas not covered by the main RL term. In other cases two or three translation equivalents will be needed for one Hebrew term, simply because of differences between the implied readers’ and RL speakers’ cognitive environments.

⁸⁷ Gordon Wenham *Genesis 16-50 Word Bible Commentary*, Word, 1994, Dallas, p326

⁸⁸ Claus Westermann *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, translated by J. J. Scullion, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1985, p554

29:1-2 בְּנֵי־קֶדֶם – the sons of the front/east – is translated “Easterners” – quite an idiomatic translation

27:4ff הִבְרַכְתָּהּ נַפְשִׁי –my *nefesh* can bless you – is rendered idiomatically as “I may solemnly bless you.”

In 34:2 we find וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֹתָהּ – “and [he] lay with her” (direct object marker/with + suffix), which could be translated more strongly⁸⁹. The idiom in this form or similar occurs in: Gen 34:2; Lev 15:18, 24; Num 5:13, 19; 2Sa 13:14. For other idioms in the same frame (“to know” and “to come into”⁹⁰), see Alter p xxx-xxxi.

Excurses on Frames: It is clear that Alter would like to translate Key Terms concordantly wherever possible. He views any divergence from this principle as a regrettable exception, as we saw above, without explaining why. Linguists have used the theoretical construct of Semantic Domains (or Fields) to group Key Terms together for some time now. More recently the idea of Frames has been found useful. The theory is that the human brain links concepts together using Frames rather than Semantic Domains. Frames are conceptual networks that cut across Semantic Domains, and therefore link them.⁹¹ For a given word in a given context only one Frame and Semantic Domain will be active, but considering a word as a sign pointing to a bundle of meanings, it can, in general, interact with multiple Frames and Semantic Domains. For example, the term “menu” has the sense “list of available dishes” in the frame of restaurants, but in the frame of computing, it means “the list that drops down when clicked on.” The context or “frame” disambiguates the term. The fact that frames cut across Semantic Domains makes them useful in that they lead to studies of terms not related directly by meaning but by general theme, such as “agriculture.” Frames also provide a criterion for isolating each sense of a term. Taking Alter’s question about נַפְשִׁי a little further, then, the following table shows that the frame in question can help translators decide which sense of the term is in use as they work on the Jacob story:

⁸⁹ Sternberg and Alter both note that it is pointed as an object marker: “What for lack of an equivalent I translated as ‘lay with’ is in fact a transitive verb (*va’yishkab otah*, i.e., ‘laid her’) that reduces the victim to a mere object...” Sternberg *op. cit.* p446. “‘Lay with’ is more brutal in the Hebrew because instead of being followed by the preposition ‘with’... it is followed by a direct object... and in this form may denote rape.” Alter *op. cit.* footnote p189 Given the chain of verbs “saw... took... lay...” and depending on the sensitivity of the audience, it does not seem too strong to use NET’s “sexually assaulted her” for this idiom here.

⁹⁰ Alter translates this as “come to bed with” but we prefer “entered her tent” implying that they are left alone together for the first time.

⁹¹ Cognitive Linguistics has been at the forefront of the discussion of frames. Scripts and schemas are also related to this idea. See Taylor p87-98, Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 1987, p164-165 (though his designation for Frames is “Domains”), and the essay “An Analysis of גִּלְהָ (glh) in the Hebrew Bible” by this author, for further information. Cognitive Linguistics generally helps with word and sentence-level analysis, whereas Relevance Theory is more interested in the overall communication and its context. Both are a move away from traditional grammatical and semantic analyses (Chomsky’s surface structure and deep structure).

<i>Collocating Verb</i>	<i>Frame</i>	<i>Translation Equivalent of נִפְשׁ in English⁹²</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
ברך pi.	speech acts ⁹³ - blessing	“I” ⁹⁴	27:4; 27:19; 27:25; 27:31
נצל ni. יצא	life and death	“life”; “spirit”	32:31; 35:18
רבק השק	love, relationships	“heart”	34:3; 34:8

TABLE 4

FRAMES

Cognitive linguistics provides a rationale for “fuzzy-logic” translation of more abstract Key Terms i.e. translating them according to the frame that disambiguates them, rather than attempting to translate them concordantly. Frames, then, provide a rationale for the non-concordant translation of Key Terms, as an alternative to merely translating them according to the immediate context.

Clarity and Naturalness

29:1-2 וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו is translated “And Jacob lifted his feet” – quite a FC translation, and not at all natural in English, though he has kept it for literary reasons (the footnote explains the parallel with “lifted his voice” in 27:38). Even the AV has “continued his journey” here, removing the idiom completely.

Coming back to 27:28-29 it seems that v28 does not read well in English;

“May God grant you

from the dew of the heavens and the fat of the earth.”

It sounds as if something is missing. What will God grant him that comes from heavenly dew, one wonders?

⁹² Notice that all the occurrences of נִפְשׁ here are in the suffixed (possessive) form e.g. נִפְשִׁי “my spirit.”

⁹³ A speech act is a use of words to change circumstances e.g. “I hereby pronounce you man and wife” or “I name this ship...” See <http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsASpeechAct.htm> accessed 10th May 2006 for more precise definitions.

⁹⁴ Alter inserts “solemnly” before the verb “bless” here to account for the use of נִפְשׁ (suff. 1s).

Unclear Referent: The referent is unclear in Alter's Gen 33:5 "And Esau ran to meet him... And he raised his eyes and saw the women and the children and he said, 'Who are these with you?' And *he* said, 'The children with whom God has favored your servant.'"⁹⁵ The Hebrew is unambiguous, but Alter's translation is ambiguous. English needs to replace the personal pronoun "he," with the name "Jacob," as per RSV. This is a justifiable explication on linguistic grounds, but Alter fails to make it, and as a result his translation here is unclear (and inaccurate).

ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF RELEVANCE THEORY

Assuming that his translation is aimed at a fairly academic, biblically literate audience, Alter does a good job in filling in the gaps between a modern audience's and the biblical cognitive environments. His translation may fail at times to be relevant, however, due to his rather wooden English style. To some this may be "gravely cadenced"⁹⁶ but it is more likely that in attempting to keep the Hebrew style he has only succeeded in driving many readers away. Since RT aims to avoid explications in the text, claims to help with exegetical issues, and keep literary features, those topics have been dealt with in detail below.

Implicit Information

This is mainly conveyed using footnotes (the "Commentary"), and in Alter's introduction ("To the Reader"). The use of footnotes is particularly interesting – in some sections of Genesis they take up more space than the main body text.

They include the following information:

1. Notes on word-plays "and other untranslatable maneuvers of the Hebrew" i.e. literary features.
2. Textual apparatus (divergences from the MT, etc.).
3. Surprising translation choices.
4. Nuances not expressible in the English translation.
5. Literal translations of the Hebrew where the translation in the text is FE.
6. Cultural background of the ANE.⁹⁷

Obviously there can be some overlap between these, but 4. might for instance give information on the prototypical sense of the Hebrew term used, then explain why a different TE had been chosen, whereas 1. generally has a much larger scope. The literary features are also implied information, but at a higher level. Examples of both of these can be seen in the discussion of literary features below.

⁹⁵ Alter *op. cit.* p184-185

⁹⁶ Jonathan Groner *Washington Post*, quoted on the back cover of Alter *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Abbreviated from Alter *ibid.* p xlix

It is, however, important that the footnotes themselves are kept relevant to the audience, a point Alter at times forgets (e.g. 28:11 footnote 2. Alter seems to think it unlikely that stones were used as pillows) i.e. sometimes the processing effort in reading the footnotes outweighs the benefit gained in understanding the text.

Exegesis

RT can help with exegetical decisions. Is כַּר a “saddle” or a “cushion” in 31:34? Alter has chosen the latter. RT helps rule out unlikely choices by encouraging the study of the biblical context. It also helps rule out extremely unlikely choices based on etymology of words e.g. Ugaritic cognates that do not fit the context, or choice of word senses that do not fit.⁹⁸ Did they have camel saddles? Perhaps not as we have; they would probably have been ornate woven saddle-bags. RT also provides the opportunity for a new kind of criticism – finding out the likely cognitive environment of the original audience. This is not an exact science as it builds a case from inferences – if a piece of information is assumed, then the audience must have known it. If stated, they probably did not. In the example above, the audience would have known, better than us, what a כַּר was, from which we can deduce that they rode camels and understood about their paraphernalia.

Literary Features

Literary and poetic features are an example of weak communication, according to relevance theory. Both Gutt and Weber⁹⁹ advise translators not to turn these into strong communication, by use of explicatures, or the literary/poetic effect will be destroyed. Alter has tried to mirror the Hebrew form, but in so doing he is in danger of losing much of the weak communication (implicatures). Alter has kept replaced these wherever possible, in the form of footnotes, See literary translation, below.

Conclusion

Chomsky’s linguistic model, and the Code Model of translation that was largely derived from it, has been found to be simplistic. It failed to show the limits of translation. Interestingly, Alter, with his translation of Genesis, is, perhaps unwittingly, following a RT-based model in providing both a literary translation and an expansive commentary, though this is not to say that RT supports the introduction of copious footnotes, per se. He has, however, realised that what the reader lacks in terms of biblical knowledge and understanding need to be supplied somehow. An audience that is biblically somewhat literate, but lacking understanding of the finer details of Hebrew language and culture, need a commentary close

⁹⁸ E.g. von Rad would like to translate וַיִּרְיַח אֱלֹהִים in Gen 1:2 as “storm of God” or “terrible storm” i.e. he understands אֱלֹהִים as a superlative. This seems unlikely, on the basis of RT arguments. Gerhard von Rad *Genesis* SCM Press Ltd, 1972, p49

⁹⁹ David J. Weber “A Tale of Two Translation Theories” in *Journal of Translation* Volume 1, No. 2 (2005) p35-74p55-56

at hand. Alter has supplied this beneath the text, in the form of extensive footnotes, as well as in his introduction.

ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

Parataxis

Alter mostly keeps the Hebrew verb chains, translating *waw* as “and.” He does not do this in all cases however, and is often forced by English syntax into using some hypotactic structures. For example:

וְאֵלֶּיךָ עָשָׂה אֲתָם מִטַּעַמִּים לְאָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהֵב

Is translated, “...*that* I may make them into a dish for your father of the kind he loves” (27:9b, emphasis mine) i.e. it uses a subordinate clause, which is more natural in English.

One use of Alter’s translation may be as a reference-text for those translating into paratactic languages. It would, therefore, have been better if he had kept the parataxis in all cases, rather than resorting to hypotaxis where he deemed it necessary. See Appendix E for an example.

Alter’s translation of **גַּם** *gam* deserves a study in its own right. He translates this discourse marker as “yes,” “actually,” “now” rather than rendering it woodenly as “also” each time. Why, one wonders, does he not apply the same principle to **וַ** *waw*?¹⁰⁰

Word Order

This seems to be the greatest problem with Alter’s translation. His translation often sounds either wooden or foreign. The translation frequently moves away from natural English word order. What is this, and how does it differ from that of Ancient Hebrew?

Changes in word order at the syntax level can be used to emphasize or bring into focus certain key pieces of information. Our primary goal is to establish the usual word order for Ancient Hebrew, and for English. The usual Hebrew word-order is VSO (verb-subject-object), though this is debated by Joüon, Hadas-Lebel and Revell. The main problem seems to be that *wayyiqtol* clauses have to be VSO, as they do not allow a pre-verbal element. *X-qatal* clauses, on the other hand, are by definition SVO, according to Heimerdinger.¹⁰¹ If *wayyiqtol* clauses are the default clause type for narratives, however, then *X-qatal* clauses (where X is the subject or some other element) must surely signal some kind of move away from the main narrative flow. Heimerdinger eventually decides to agree with those arguing

¹⁰⁰ See p xvii in Alter *op. cit.* for his own explanation.

¹⁰¹ Jean Marc Heimerdinger *Topic, Focus and Foreground In Ancient Hebrew Narratives* JSOT, Sheffield, 1999, p21-26.

for a basic VSO word-order, following Waltke and O'Connor, Lambdin and Muraoka,¹⁰² though he does not seem to give a clear reason for doing so. English, with most Indo-European languages, is SVO and mostly uses intonation for focus in spoken English, whereas in literary English the element in restrictive or contrastive focus is fronted using a nominal clause if a subject is involved e.g. "It was *me* who told you about the storms in America." English does not mark intonation patterns, so the literary language tends to compensate for this by using more complex sentence patterns.¹⁰³ Linguists tend to differ on how they define such terms as topic and focus. Another definition, for instance, is that topics are "old information" whereas the focus contains the "new information."¹⁰⁴ Shinji shows that the topic is usually first in English, and the focus last, unless the focus is contained in a verbless clause such as, "It is curry and rice that he really likes," as opposed to the simple, "He really likes curry and rice." The topic, is of course "he" in these examples. De Regt (below) separates Shinji's idea of "focus" into "restrictive/contrastive focus" and "salient information."

Hebrew verbless clauses, with English, tend to default to Subject-Predicate, but when necessary the Predicate is fronted to show focus.¹⁰⁵ According to Alter, however:

"...biblical syntax is more flexible than modern English syntax, and there are hundreds of instances in Genesis of syntactical inversions and, especially, emphatic first positioning of weighted terms. Syntactical inversion, however, is familiar enough in the more traditional strata of literary English, and if one adopts a general norm of decorous stylization for the prose of the translation... it becomes feasible to reproduce most of the *Hebrew reconfigurations of syntax, preserving the thematic or psychological emphases they are meant to convey*. The present translation does this, I think, to a greater degree than all previous English versions."¹⁰⁶ (emphasis mine)

Here Alter is straying into the territory of the current branch of linguistics variously termed "Discourse Analysis" or "Text Linguistics." Notice that he claims that in preserving the Hebrew word order, he is keeping the "thematic or psychological emphases" built into those linguistic configurations. Can Alter's claim be substantiated? He seems to be assuming that Hebrew and English have similar discourse structures.

¹⁰² Quoted in Heimerdinger *ibid.* p24-25 and especially p101 where he emphasises this point quite strongly

¹⁰³ Chet A. Creider *On the Explanation of Transformations* pp 3-21 in "Syntax and Semantics – Discourse and Syntax" Ed. Talmy Givón, Academic Press, NY, 1979 p9-14.

¹⁰⁴ Takasugi Shinji <http://www.sf.airnet.ne.jp/~ts/japanese/topicfocus.html> accessed 10th May 2006.

¹⁰⁵ Katsuomi Shimasaki *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew – A study of Word Order and Information Structure* CDL Press, Bethesda, Maryland, 2002 p240-244. Shimasaki also contends that intonation patterns can be read from the Masoretic accents, and that these help identify focus, but this is fairly speculative, since they were added late, and no one is sure what they refer to. In any case Alter's chosen RL, literary English, not marking intonation, tends to mark focus in other compensatory ways e.g. changes in word order and various other discourse patterns. See also Randall Buth 'Word Order in the Verbless Clause: A Generative-Functional Approach' pp79-108 in ed. Cynthia L. Miller *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew*, Eisenbrauns, USA, 1999, p107-108

¹⁰⁶ Alter *op. cit.* p xxxii. In most cases he does attempt to keep the Hebrew word-order intact. See examples below.

Lénart de Regt, a UBS consultant, has critiqued Alter's translation, comparing it with the above claims, and suggests that Alter has confused *restrictive/contrastive focus* with the idea of *most salient information*. The former denotes fronting, moving the subject or object in front of the verb. The latter refers to the information found at the end of the sentence, which is salient i.e. most important. Just to complicate matters, the discourse analyst also needs to be aware of the *topical participant*. This character will also tend to be fronted i.e. before the verb. Since all three can cause syntactical inversions, one has to be careful in one's analysis of the sentence structure to make sure all eventualities have been covered. De Regt's conclusion is as follows:

"It remains unclear, though, why Alter's translations show a certain leaning towards literal (rather than literary) translation in some places and not in others. It has certainly kept syntactic inversions that are due to restrictive or contrastive focus, which has the same literary effect in English as in the Hebrew. However, when it is a topical referent or spatial/temporal basis that has been put in first position in the Hebrew (so as to allow the most salient information to come at the end of the sentence), maintaining such syntactical inversions in Alter's translation hardly has the same literary effect in English."¹⁰⁷

See Appendix H for some examples.

Another mistake that Alter makes is to translate *qatal* phrases woodenly. One example is from 32:1b-2, with clause type and Alter's translation following:

¹⁰⁷ Lénart de Regt, "Hebrew Syntactical Inversions and their Literary Equivalence in English: Robert Alter's Translation of Genesis and 1 and 2 Samuel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. No. 30, 287-314, 2006, p311

(וַיֵּלֶךְ)		
וַיָּשָׁב לָבָן לְמִקְוֵאוֹ:	<i>wayyiqtol</i>	and Laban (went off and) returned to his place
וַיֵּעָקֵב הָלֶךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ	<i>X-qatal</i>	And Jacob had gone on his way,
וַיִּפְגְּעוּ-בּוֹ מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים	<i>wayyiqtol</i>	and messengers of God accosted ¹⁰⁸ him.

TABLE 5

DISCOURSE FEATURES OF GEN 32:1b-2

Anderson analyses the *X-qatal* phrase in 32:2a as a circumstantial clause within a chiasmic structure, marking an “episode” or “paragraph” boundary.¹⁰⁹ The *qatal* verb, then, should not be translated using the pluperfect English verb “had gone.” Better, with Heimerdinger, and the NJB, to see the *X-qatal* form embedded within *wayyiqtol* sequences here as showing some kind of “iterative or durative” action.¹¹⁰ It acts as a discourse marker within the chiasmic structure; “Jacob, *meanwhile*, went on his way...”

To summarise: in the above section I have argued that Alter should have *changed* the word order, or used an English construction with an equivalent mood or aspect, in order to *keep the sense* of the Hebrew discourse structure when necessary.

¹⁰⁸ This is a rather strange translation. The verb פָּגַע is used three times in Genesis, each with a different frame. It is used here and also in GEN 23:8 where it means “intercedes,” and in 28:11 where it means “came across” or “came to.” Here in Gen 32:2 it probably means “met with.”

¹⁰⁹ “...the anaphoric bō in Ge 32² shows that” ... וַיֵּעָקֵב הָלֶךְ “begins a new episode, even though its chiasmus with the preceding clause suggests that it ends the preceding episode.” Francis I. Andersen *The sentence in biblical Hebrew* Mouton, The Hague, 1974 p81. See also comments on this in Bailey, Nicholas A. and Levinsohn, Stephen H. ‘The Function of Preverbal Elements in Independent Clauses in the Hebrew Narrative of Genesis’ in *JOTT* Vol. 5 No. 3, 1992, p 179-207, from TW

¹¹⁰ Heimerdinger *op cit.* p22. NJB has (including the initial וַיֵּלֶךְ) “Then Laban left to return home. While Jacob was going on his way, angels of God encountered him...” This contra. Joūon and Muraoko, who, citing Gen 31:33b-34 prefer to liken the *X-qatal* to “our pluperfect” *op. cit.* p391 cf. Alter’s translation of 31:33b-34, “And Rachel had taken the household gods...,” but this example seems to have been chosen to prove the point, whereas 32:1-2 would be better translated as I have suggested above.

Poetic Passages

Alter pays careful attention to poetry:

“Now, it has long been recognized by scholarship that biblical poetry reflects a stratum of Hebrew older than biblical prose: some of the grammatical forms are different, and there is a distinctive poetic vocabulary, a good deal of it archaic. No previous English translation has made a serious effort to represent the elevated and archaic nature of the poetic language in contradistinction to the prose, though that is clearly part of the intended literary effect of biblical narrative.”¹¹¹

He sets out several passages in poetic form; 25:23b; 27:28-29; 27:36b; 27:39b-40; 31:36b-40; 35:11b. I focus my attention on two of these. The following table shows 27:28-29 with 12:2-3 shown as a comparison:

27:28-29	12:2-3
<p>וַיִּתֵּן לְךָ הָאֱלֹהִים מִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ וְלֵב דָּגָן וְתִירֹשׁ: וְעַבְדְּךָ עַמִּים *וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ) לְךָ לְאֲמִים הַנֹּה גְבוּר לְאַחֶיךָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְךָ בְּגַן אֲמֶן אֲרָרְךָ אֲרוּר וּמְבָרְכֶיךָ בָרוּךְ:</p>	<p>וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶנְדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: וְאֶבְרַכְּךָ מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֲאָר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה:</p>
<p>“May God grant you from the dew of the heavens and the fat of the earth. May peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you Be overlord to your brothers, may your mother’s sons bow before you. Those who curse you be cursed, and those who bless you, blessed.”</p>	<p>“And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and those who damn you I will curse, and all the clans of the earth though you shall be blessed.”</p>

TABLE 6

GEN 27:28-29

Alter appears to have omitted the translation of:

וְלֵב דָּגָן וְתִירֹשׁ

¹¹¹ Alter *op. cit.* xxxiv-xxxv cf. Lourens de Vries ‘Bible Translation and Primary Orality,’ in *The Bible Translator* Ed. Paul Ellingworth 51:1, Jan 2000, p101-114. De Vries shows that poetry generally precedes prose in oral cultures.

which is usually rendered “and plenty of grain and wine.”

The last two lines resonate with 12:3, as the table shows. The vocabulary use in 29a differs from that in 12:3. Here we find **עַם** and **לְאָם** in contrast with **גוֹי** and **מִשְׁפָּחָה** in 12:2-3, though the overall meaning conveyed by the verses is very different i.e. the terms are in any case used in different ways. **לְאָם** is also used in 25:23 (“Two nations – in your womb, two *peoples* from our loins shall issue.” (emphasis mine)), but is not found anywhere else in Genesis. The term therefore links the two blessings passages, though Alter fails to translate **לְאָם** concordantly, so this point will be missed by even discerning readers (why not reverse “peoples” and “nations” in 27:29a?).

Notice Alter’s use of “damn” for **קלל** so that he can keep “curse” for **אָרַר**, which is good, though it does sound a little strange, “damn you!” having become a set phrase in English.¹¹² Notice also the difference in phrase-order, reflected in Alter’s translation, and the difference between the active verb “I will curse” and “be cursed” (just a participle in Hebrew i.e. “are cursed”) are also kept.

Secondly 25:23b:

שְׁנֵי *גוֹיִם (גוֹיִם) בְּבֶטֶןךָ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֵּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ
וְלְאָם מִלְאָם יֵאָמֵץ וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר

“Two nations – in your womb,
two peoples from your loins shall issue.
People over people shall prevail,
the elder, the younger’s slave.”

Notice the repetitions, which Alter keeps e.g. the repetition of **לְאָם** in “peoples... people over people” lines 1b and 2a of the Hebrew. “Loins” is quite a literal rendering of **מֵעָדָה**, and the term is also rather archaic, as well as more likely to be associated with the male reproductive organs than the female. Why not euphemistically use “belly” or “stomach,” or “insides” one wonders? “Shall issue” is a translation of **יִפְרְדוּ**, which is normally rendered “shall be divided” or “shall be separated.” The whole sentence probably has the import that the two sons who represent (and are antecedent of) nations will be rivals from the day that they are born. Alter seems to have taken **פָּרַד** in the sense of “to be separated from one’s mother’s womb.” His footnote only comments on the last line – “the elder, the younger’s slave,” which

¹¹² Readers might instinctively want to substitute “those who say ‘damn you!’”

speculates that the subject and object of the sentence might be ambiguous “the elder, the younger shall serve”.¹¹³ Since Hebrew is typically VSO and here we have SVO or OVS, the former rendering seems more likely, as the necessary syntactical inversion is less dramatic.¹¹⁴ Alter’s translation is set out as poetry on the page, and even *sounds* slightly poetic, especially his translation of the first line of Hebrew.¹¹⁵ In trying to take poetry from one language to another, one cannot expect more.¹¹⁶

Overall Alter seems to have done a good job of translating Hebrew poetry into English. His translation sounds fairly poetic in English (though at times unnatural), and he has maintained many of the Hebrew features. The only criticisms are a lack of rigour at times, and a surprising preponderance for unnecessary varying of TEs. His translation is a great improvement on those who turn poetry into prose, or are tempted to remove Hebrew parallelisms and replace them with a form that suits the RL.¹¹⁷ From a RT perspective it is doubtful that he has been able to keep all the weak implicatures, therefore he might have included more footnotes on the poetic sections so as to convey some of the beauty of the Hebrew poetry.

ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO NEW LITERARY CRITICAL APPROACHES

Now we turn to NLCAs to Hebrew narratives. I have chosen to organise the material according to its biblical story, and bring out the NLC methods, comparing Alter’s work with those of other NLC analysts.

The deception of Isaac (Gen 27:1-28:4)

Repetition of key words, characters: There can be only two “interlocutors” (participants or characters) in a dialogue, according to Alter’s understanding of “the convention of biblical narrative.” He analyses the story of Jacob’s deception of Isaac thus:

“Within the limits of this convention, the writer has woven an artful chain. The story, preponderantly in dialogue, is made up of seven interlocking scenes: Isaac-Esau, Rebekah-Jacob, Jacob-Isaac, Isaac-Esau, Rebekah-Jacob, Rebekah-Isaac, Isaac-Jacob... The first two pairs set out the father and his favorite son, then the mother and her favorite son, in opposing tracks. Husband and wife are kept apart until the penultimate scene; there is no dialogue at all between the two brothers – sundered by the formal mechanics of the narrative – or between Rebekah and Esau. Although one must always guard against the excesses of numerological excess, it is surely

¹¹³ See עֵבֶר and associated footnote in the table of context-sensitive Key Words above

¹¹⁴ The subject is fronted i.e. put before the verb. This is common; fronting the object less so.

¹¹⁵ “Two nations – in your womb, two peoples from your loins shall issue.”

¹¹⁶ Zogbo, Lynell and Wendland, Ernst R. *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible – A Guide for Understanding and for Translating* United Bible Societies, 2000, Chapter 4, on TW

¹¹⁷ This is an approach that works well for loose paraphrases, and especially in the area of adapting Psalms into songs, but lacks the necessary rigour for Bible Translation. In any case, it can be shown that most languages have parallelism of one form or another, albeit in restricted genres.

not accidental that there are just seven scenes, and that the key word “blessing” (*berakhah*) is repeated seven times.”¹¹⁸

This is very useful information for the reader, and one even wonders why Alter has not made more use of it in his translation, for instance by introducing paragraph breaks for each new scene. The footnote is useful, though the information might equally be found in a traditional commentary, or conveyed by a preacher,¹¹⁹ as with any other of Alter’s comments.

Play on words: Alter, following Fishbane, points out that the two terms “*blessing* and *birthright* (in Hebrew a pun, *berekhah* and *bekhorah*)”¹²⁰ are *leitwörter*¹²¹ in the cycle of tales about Jacob.¹²² The use of the terms in this episode is particularly poignant, reaching a climax in v36:

‘And he said,

“Was his name called Jacob

that he should trip me now twice by the heels?”¹²³

My *birthright* he took,

and look, now he’s taken my *blessing*.”¹²⁴

And he said, “Have you not kept back a *blessing* for me?” (emphasis mine)

Rhetorical devices: When Isaac says “Are you my son Esau?” in 27:24,

“The extent of Rebekah’s cunning is thus fully revealed: one might have wondered why Jacob needed his brother’s garments to appear before a father incapable of seeing them – now we realize she has anticipated the possibility that Isaac would try to smell Jacob...”¹²⁵

cf. 27:15. This may be obvious to most readers, but Alter still footnotes it to bring out the full impact of the story. Later in the same story Isaac cries out “Who is it, then, who caught game and brought it to me and I ate everything before you came and blessed him? Now blessed he stays” 27:33. “Isaac pretends not to know who it is that has deceived him, finding it easier

¹¹⁸ Alter *op. cit.* footnote p137.

¹¹⁹ Some points made by NLCA are so subtle one wonders if a preacher would dare to put them forward (the fact that there are not only seven scenes, but seven uses of the word “blessing?”), but the point about the structure of the story, especially the Isaac-Esau vs. Rebekah-Jacob rivalry, might serve to heighten the listener’s sense of excitement in the story.

¹²⁰ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p94

¹²¹ “A *Leitwort* is a word or a word root that recurs significantly in a text... by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text, or at any rate, the meaning will be revealed more strikingly.” Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* p93

¹²² See בְּרָכָה and בְּכֹרָה in Appendix G for references. The unpointed text would have had ברכה and בכרה, of course.

¹²³ It is interesting that Alter keeps the direct sense of עִקַּב here. ESV has “cheated” and RSV “supplanted.”

¹²⁴ Note how Alter keeps the chiasmic structure of the last two lines, as well as the poetic form. The Hebrew forms of לָקַח translated “took” and “taken” are virtually identical:

אֶת־בְּכֹרְתִי לָקַח וְהִנֵּה עָתָה לָקַח בְּרָכְתִּי

¹²⁵ Alter *op. cit.* footnote p140

to let Esau name the culprit for himself.”¹²⁶ This is a very useful observation, as many readers will fail to observe the implication here. It is good that Alter kept the question as a question, rather than trying to turn it into a statement, despite the fact that it is probably rhetorical.¹²⁷ The question also has the effect of making the story more vivid, thus conveying a sense of *mimesis*.

Alter comments on **point of view** in various footnotes on the text of Genesis. These are changes in repeated information, as a story is retold from different perspectives i.e. that of the narrator vs. one of the characters, or one of the characters vs. another. Phrase differences in dialogues can reveal differences between various characters' points of view.

'and I shall bless you in the LORD's presence. Rebekah substitutes this for “that I may solemnly bless you” in the actual speech on which she eaves-dropped, thus heightening the sense of the sacred and irrevocable character of the blessing she wants Jacob to steal.”¹²⁸

Alter does well to keep to the literary forms in his translation and point out the difference in his footnote. The LB omits the whole speech, having only: “she called her son Jacob and told him what his father had said to his brother” for 27:6-7. This loses the contrast completely.

When Jacob says “I am Esau your firstborn” in 27:19 he is using a loaded term, according to Alter. The narrator carefully refers to Esau as the “elder son” (27:15) or “[Jacob's] brother” (27:30). Esau's own use of the term “firstborn” in 27:30 fails to elicit the response he hopes for, however, as all of the blessing has already been given to Jacob.¹²⁹ Alter does well to make these useful observations for the reader in his footnotes.

Repetition of phrases can include contractions: Rebekah commands Jacob:

לְךָ-נָא אֶל-הַצֹּאֵן וְקַח-לִי מִשָּׁם שְׁנֵי בָרִי עֵזִים טָבִים

“Go, pray, to the flock, and fetch me from there two choice kids.” When her command is carried out, however, the narrator only repeats two of the key verbs to produce the concise:

וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּקַּח וַיָּבֵא לְאִמּוֹ

(27:9, 14).¹³⁰ Alter faithfully reproduces this like so; “And he went and fetched and he brought to his mother.” Many translations fill out the contraction by inserting the pronoun “them” (NIV, GNB), which is necessary on linguistic grounds, or making “goat” explicit (NET,

¹²⁶ Alter *op. cit.* footnote p142

¹²⁷ This is good practice, assuming that the RL tolerates rhetorical questions. Some do not, in which case they need to be rephrased as statements, though preferably with the addition of some literary or discourse feature to make up for the lack of rhetorical device.

¹²⁸ Alter *op. cit.* footnote on 27:7 p138

¹²⁹ Alter *op. cit.* footnote on 27:19 p139 cf. footnote on 27:32 p141 which also contrasts Jacob's and Esau's placing of the term “firstborn” within their utterances, showing another difference in point of view, this time between them rather than between the narrator and Jacob.

¹³⁰ Alter *Art* p8

NLT), which is *not*. In so doing NET and NLT have lost some of the literary features of the text. See above under *Implicit Information*.

Repeated phrases can also include expansions:¹³¹ "...that I may solemnly bless you before I die... Rebekah said... '...and I shall bless you in the LORD's presence before I die'" (27:2-7). Rebekah's repetition of Jacob's words inserts "in the LORD's presence." The import of this is to let the reader know that Rebekah is embellishing Isaac's words in order to encourage her son Jacob to carry out her (devious) intentions. The addition is "designed to affect the addressee's attitude."¹³² It is even possible, as Alter suggests, that Rebekah is implying that any blessing gained from Isaac will be binding,¹³³ coming, as it does, with Yahweh's authority i.e. Isaac, as a patriarch, is seen as Yahweh's representative on earth. Alter rightly uses a footnote to point out the expansion and its purpose – something that a reader might easily miss, but is implicit in the Hebrew.

The Rape of Dinah (Gen 34)

Adele Berlin has documented the differences between the three speeches which outline the terms of the negotiations for Dinah. There are several **scenes** within the story, most easily discovered by looking at the principle **characters**, and geographical location: As the TV camera, as it were, follows the characters around their geographical locations, we see various changes in the story. Here is an adaptation of Berlin's table,¹³⁴ substituting Alter's translation for hers, and introducing scenes:

¹³¹ Lines are repeated, but also expanded. Alter *op cit.* p98 (regarding Bathsheba's speech in 1Ki 1). She "expands them with the most persuasive inventiveness" – words which could be equally attributed to Rebekah in Gen 27.

¹³² Sternberg *ibid.* p393.

¹³³ "...thus heightening the sense of the sacred and irrevocable character of the blessing she wants Jacob to steal." Alter *Genesis* footnote p138. Whether or not the blessing was, in fact, irrevocable is besides the point, as the characters in the story do not yet know this (though the reader might, at least by the end of the story).

¹³⁴ Berlin *ibid.* p77

<i>Characters</i>	<i>1. Hamor to Jacob's sons</i>	<i>2. Jacob's sons to Hamor and Shechem</i>	<i>3. Hamor and Shechem to their compatriots</i>
<i>Ref.</i>	v1-4	v5-18	v19-24
<i>Scene</i>	Hivite territory	Jacob's place	Shechem's town
<i>Alter's Translation</i>	<p>ally with us by marriage –</p> <p>your daughters you will give to us and our daughters, take for yourselves</p> <p>and among us you will settle, and the land is before you: settle and go about in it and take holdings in it</p>	<p>Then we can give our daughters to you and your daughters we can take for ourselves,</p> <p>and we can settle among you and become one folk.</p>	<p>These men come in peace to us. Let them settle in the land go about it, for the land, look, is ample before them.</p> <p>Their daughters we shall take us as wives and our daughters we shall give to them.</p> <p>Only in this way will the men agree to us,</p> <p>to settle with us to be one folk...</p> <p>Their possessions in livestock and all their cattle, will they not be ours, if only we agree to them and they settle among us?</p>

TABLE 7

AN ADAPTATION OF BERLIN'S TABLE ON GEN 34

Berlin notes that:

1. Hamor talks about marriage bonds first, and commercial arrangements second, in order to sweeten the pill
2. Jacob's sons fail to mention business, but introduce the idea of becoming "one folk"
3. Hamor and Shechem reverse the order of "giving" and "taking" daughters when speaking to their townsfolk, in order to make the deal sound more appealing – "their daughters we shall take." Their mention of "one folk" is, according to Berlin, a quote within a quote: "Only on this condition will the men consent to us 'to settle among us and become one people.'"

She continues, "By presenting the internal Hivite point of view, which is somewhat dissonant with the view presented earlier, the narrative creates an element of ambiguity in the mind of the reader, which prevents him from totally losing sympathy with Jacob's sons."¹³⁵ The LB loses the contrast in point 3, by simplifying the phrase to, "and we can intermarry with them" whereas Alter keeps the contrast nicely; "Their daughters we shall take us as wives and our daughters we shall give to them" (34:21).

Interestingly, Alter only inserts paragraph breaks after 18 and 24, keeping our scenes 1. and 2. as one. There is some basis for this, as 19 and 25 both contain time phrases "And the lad lost no time in doing the thing..." and "And it happened on the third day..." respectively, whereas in 5 the story continues without a time phrase. It does however have an *X-qatal* verb form: וַיֵּקֶב שָׁמַע. The following verb in the same verse is similar: וַיִּבְנֶי הָיִי. The main narrative *wayyiqtol* verb form is only found again in the next verse (v6). This probably indicates at least a minor break while some background information is conveyed to the reader (see *Word Order*, above).

Regarding **repetition**: Variance in vocabulary can also show contrasts between **points of view**, as we saw above. In the story of Dinah we find a contrast in points of view, both between narrator and character, and early narration and later narration:

‘The variations may consist of the substitution of one term for another, and addition or an omission, a change in the order of terms, or a change in syntax. Some of these variations are the result of intentional deception on the part of characters, or reflect their psychological or rhetorical needs. For example, in Gen 34:3 the narrator says that Shechem *loved* Dinah, but when Hamor comes to ask for her as his son's wife he puts it more strongly, saying, "My son *longs for* your daughter."¹³⁶

Again, Alter keeps the contrast, using "loved" and "his very self longs for your daughter," respectfully. Alter discusses some other terms used to refer to Shechem and Dinah in his introduction:

"In the story of the rape of Dinah (chapter 34), she is first referred to as 'Leah's daughter' – and not Jacob's daughter, for it is Leah's sons, Simeon and Levi, who

¹³⁵ Berlin *ibid.* p77-78. LB and NIV "set his heart on" for וַיִּשָּׂא לִבּוֹ in v8 is much too weak. Better "in love with" NET or "fallen in love with" GNB

¹³⁶ Berlin *ibid.* p71 the latter in 34:8

will exact vengeance for her. The initial designation of daughter aligns her with both 'the daughters of the land' among whom she goes out to see, and Shechem, Hamor's son, ('son' and 'daughter' are cognates in Hebrew), who sees her, takes her, and rapes her. After the act of violation, Shechem is overcome with love for Dinah, and he implores his father, 'Take me this girl [*yaldah*] as wife.' Speaking to his father, then, he identifies – tenderly? – the victim of his own lust as a girl-child. When he parleys with Dinah's brothers, asking permission to marry her, he says, 'Give me the young woman [*na'arah*] as wife,' now using the term for a nubile woman that is strictly appropriate to betrothal negotiations. After the brothers stipulate their surgical precondition for the betrothal, the narrator reports, 'and the lad [*na'ar*] lost no time doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter.' Suddenly, as the catastrophe of this gruesome tale becomes imminent, we learn that the sexually impulsive man is only a lad, probably an adolescent like Dinah – a discovery that is bound to complicate our task of moral judgement."¹³⁷

Alter has kept all the above Hebrew literary subtleties in his actual translation. He uses "girl" for *yaldah*, "young woman" for *na'arah*, and "lad" for *na'ar*. Perhaps "girl," "lass" and "lad" respectively, might have worked better still, given the collocation between the two terms in the colloquial phrase "lads and lasses."¹³⁸

Esau and Jacob (Gen 25)

Resonance, play on words: This is where the Hebrew of a certain phrase resonates with an earlier Hebrew phrase, but this is hard to spot in the translation. Alter generally comments on these in as footnote e.g. Esau's *lamah zeh li* vs. Rebekah's *lamah zeh 'anokhi* in 25:22.¹³⁹ There is also a play on words in 26:8, where the verb לַחֵךְ "to laugh, play" sounds like the name of Isaac¹⁴⁰ – see Alter's third footnote on the verse, p133. See also footnotes on 26:12 "And Issac sowed," 26:22, 27:8, 27:46 "what good to me is life?" Without footnotes such as these the puns are lost to the reader of the English translation.

Contrast in character: Alter loses the contrast in character between Esau and Jacob in 25:27 "...Esau was a man skilled in hunting, a man of the field, and Jacob was a simple man, a dweller in tents."¹⁴¹ (emphasis mine) This is due to his desire to translate *waw* concordantly as "and." Better Berlins's translation: "Esau was an expert hunter, an outdoorsman, but Jacob was a mild man, an indoor type."¹⁴² (emphasis mine) *Waw* has a very wide semantic range, including the equivalents of English "and," "but," and "now."

Application of Literary and New Literary Critical Approaches to Bible Translation

Before moving on, it may be useful to summarise the above analysis:

¹³⁷ Alter *Genesis* p xxviii-xxix

¹³⁸ Translators should endeavour to find roughly equivalent, and preferably cognate terms for *na'ar* and *na'arah*, if they exist.

¹³⁹ footnote on 25:32 p129

¹⁴⁰ cf. 21:9 though not all commentators understand לַחֵךְ in the sense of "to play" here. Alter has "to laugh." Alter does well in 26:8 to use "play," so it is a pity he has not used the same TE in 21:9 (though this is an exegetical issue – Ishmael could well have been mocking Isaac). The phrase in question is לַחֵךְ מִצַּחֵךְ.

¹⁴¹ Alter *op. cit.* p128

¹⁴² Berlin *op. cit.* p40

1. Alter's translation has avoided harmonising accounts or adding in too many explicatures, as this would have led to a loss of the literary effects of the Hebrew narrative.
2. Alter's translation does well to involve literary, and not merely linguistic analysis of the text.¹⁴³ He could, however, have paid more attention to paragraph breaks, which do not always fit the scenes commented on in the footnotes. He covers most NLCAs, but tends to avoid commenting on *mimesis* or *gaps*.¹⁴⁴
3. Many literary allusions will escape the reader, and cannot, should not, according to RT, be communicated in the text itself. Therefore Alter has (rightly) inserted copious footnotes explaining these. Perhaps because he has not decided exactly who his audience is, some of the footnotes are less relevant than others, however.
4. Some Key Terms have been translated concordantly – especially those with a fixed referent. Others, such as adjectives and abstract nouns, had to be translated using “fuzzy logic” according to their frame of use in the passage concerned. Footnotes showing any plays on words that have been lost as a result would have been helpful.
5. His translation of poetry is also literary; much less “flat” than that of the NIV, for instance.
6. The main criticism of his translation is that the English often sounds wooden or unnatural.

¹⁴³ Bible Translators would do well to read commentaries based on New Literary Critical readings, as these are often more helpful than other types of critical analysis.

¹⁴⁴ This is more Sternberg's domain, though Alter does bring out the *mimesis* in the narratives, without actually using the term; see Appendix D.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Having reviewed the various theories of how to carry out Bible translation, I have looked at Literary and NLCAs and then analysed part of Alter's translation of Genesis. His translation was found to be similar in form to those espousing RT as an alternative, or modification of, the Code Model behind FE approaches. The main similarities are threefold:

1. A view of translation as an extension of the original communication between the narrator and his audience.
2. A *direct* or *transparent* translation. The term "literary" translation is to be preferred, as it implies more about the inclusion of poetic effects.
3. Copious use of footnotes¹⁴⁵ to explain what cannot be included in the translation, especially implicit information of various kinds, and in Alter's case various literary features of the Hebrew narrative that cannot be conveyed in the text of the translation itself.

This does not mean to say that receptor-focused approaches have been superseded. A literary translation attempts to transfer the function of the Hebrew literary forms, rather than transferring an objectively discernable "meaning" behind the text, yet Alter does himself use an idiomatic or receptor-focused approach to translation when needed, and does not always translate key words concordantly, even when he could have done so. Up to a point all translations are FE, in that they paraphrase, or change the word order (as seen above, Alter is guilty of *not* changing the word-order when he *should* have done so, to allow the focus, topic and salient information to function in the way they should). The only exceptions are interlinears, and even these struggle to translate word-for-word in such a way that the parallel English translation agrees with the gloss under the Hebrew term.¹⁴⁶

The main difference between receptor-focused translations following the CEV/GNB model and Alter's translation is their attitude to implicit information. The CEV is quite happy to explicate, the GNB to simplify the translation.¹⁴⁷ Alter is rightly wary of doing this, as it tends

¹⁴⁵ Or other "helps" e.g. books on biblical background and culture, atlases, diagrams, sermons... RT does not specify how the cultural gap is to be closed. Alter has chosen to close it using his introduction and footnotes.

¹⁴⁶ See John R. III Kohlenberger (Editor) *The Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament: Genesis-Malachi* Zondervan Hebrew Reference Series, 1993, with NIV in parallel, for an example. It tends to modify the gloss to make it approximate the NIV text given in parallel e.g. **אֲנִי** is glossed "self-of-me" in 27:4 and translated "I" in parallel, whereas in 2:7 **אֲנִי** is glossed "into-being" with only "being" in parallel.

¹⁴⁷ It may be necessary to carry out GNB or even CEV-style translations in some parts of the world (as long as they aren't FC translations of the GNB!), due to the non-literate first-Bible nature of the receptor group. These translations will be seen as a temporary stop-gap, as they inevitably distort the communication, while failing to close the contextual gap. The RL group needs to "own" the translation. They will move on in their

to remove most Hebrew literary features. Translations influenced by relevance theory are also wary of explicatures, as they distort the communication. Gutt recommends keeping explicit information explicit, *and* conveying implicit information by implicatures in the translation (the ideal)¹⁴⁸, or using extra-translation material of some kind (footnotes, maps, diagrams, commentaries, other helps, sermons, etc.) to close the gap between cognitive environments (original and RL). Alter was assuming a Western, highly-literate audience,¹⁴⁹ therefore his helps take the form of footnotes and an extended introduction “To The Reader.” Literary and direct/transparent translations have been found to be a useful tightening up of the FE model in that they restrict the number and type of explicatures allowed. On the positive side literary models of translation such as Wendland’s LiFE, RT approaches to poetry, and Alter’s translation of Genesis encourage translators to be aware of poetic features, including them whenever they can in their translation. It is a pity that Alter has deferred to Hebrew over English style, however, as this does not help his translation “flow.” One possible future study would be to analyse his more recent translations (Pentateuch, 1&2 Samuel), to see if they are more natural and fluent. Another might be to study Adele Berlin’s translation of Esther.

The Code Model is fast becoming the old paradigm for translation. It is being transformed into a new paradigm that takes into account:

1. The literary beauty and style of the Hebrew original
2. Pragmatics; the communication situation and cognitive environment of both the original audience and the current RL community

These are related in as much as the Hebrew cognitive environment affected the beauty and style of the OT, therefore what defines beauty and good style will be different for the RL community. Given that there are both language and culture universals, some aspects of literary style will be able to be left as is, and the beauty of the original will be allowed to shine through. In other cases they will need to be changed in order to preserve the literary effects. Only then will the translation be functionally equivalent in both literary *and* linguistic ways.

understanding of the Bible., and may eventually insist on a more “faithful” translation i.e. one that keeps more closely to the form of the Hebrew. It will then be necessary to fill the contextual gap with helps of various kinds.

¹⁴⁸ This is only possible in cases where the cognitive environments of both audiences (original and RL) largely equate.

¹⁴⁹ He refers to the “general reader” and the “scholarly reader” on p.lix

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – MODERN ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Functional Equivalence ----- *Formal Correspondence*

CEV, GNB (TEV), NLT, TNIV, NIV, REB, NJB, NRS, RSV, ESV, Tanakh (NJV)

Low Register ----- *High Register*

CEV, GNB (TEV), NLT, TNIV, NIV, Tanakh (NJV), NRS, RSV, ESV, NJB, REB

APPENDIX B – EXPLICATURES IN MARK 2:1-10

<u>2:1</u>	IDN	at home, <i>the house where he was living</i> (OR, <i>Peter and Andrew's house</i>) [explication of 'home' and/or to avoid wrong implicature]
<u>2:2</u>	MOA	<i>inside the house or even about the door</i> [ellipsis: set formula with 'even']
<u>2:4</u>	INT	removed <i>part of the roof after going up the outside stairs</i> [cultural background]
<u>2:4</u>	MNS	let down the pallet <i>by ropes</i> [cultural background and/or to avoid wrong/zero implicature]
<u>2:5</u>	OBJ	saw their faith <i>that he could heal the man</i> [content of cognitive event]
<u>2:5</u>	AOP	forgiven <i>by me</i> [case frame: agent]
<u>2:7</u>	MNS	this fellow blasphemes <i>by claiming that he, like God, can forgive sin</i> [logical step in argument]
<u>2:8</u>	ASS	Jesus, knowing <i>that they believed that healing people and forgiving sins are things that only God can do</i> , said, ... [belief system and/or cultural background]
<u>2:9</u>	REA	it is easier/easy to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' <i>because people won't be able to test your claim</i> [logical explanation]
<u>2:9</u>	REA	<i>it is far more risky</i> to say, 'Rise up and walk,' <i>because people can see if it happens</i> [explication of comparison and logical explanation]
<u>2:10</u>	EVE	<i>I will do something that you consider to be God's prerogative, but which can be easily verified</i> , so that you may know [ellipsis of events and/or logical step in argument]
<u>2:10</u>	ADD	authority to forgive sins, <i>which you also consider to be God's prerogative, but which cannot be visibly verified</i> [implicature of argument and/or belief system]

ABBREVIATIONS

ADD	added action	GRD	grounds that support a conclusion
AOP	agent of passive	Hi	hiphil
ASS	assumption (or belief), true or false, behind some statement	IDN	identification/qualification/specification
CCL	conclusion to be drawn	INC	inclusion of one place, person, or group as a subcategory of another
CND	condition	INT	intervening action
CNO	connotation	IRO	irony
CNQ	consequence	IRR	irrealis
CNS	concession	KIN	kinship relation
CPR	comparison	LAN	language source or meaning
CTR	contrast	LOC	location
CTX	contraexpectation	MAN	manner
EGI	emphasis of a generality stating its application to an insignificant member of the whole class	MNS	means
EVE	event	MOA	more obvious action/item
EVL	evaluation from another viewpoint, often that of God	NIA	non-identity of actors
EXE	executive agent	OBJ	object/content
EXS	exclusiveness	OPA	other participants

ORI	orienter, especially to some cited speech content	SEP	separation from some location, individual, or situation
Pi	Piel	S/M	simile or metaphor
PRE	previous state, which has now been altered	SIM	simultaneous action
PUR	purpose/significance	SOU	source
RCP	recipient	T/A	tense/aspect
REA	reason	TIM	time
REC	recurrence of action	YNA	yes/no
REF	reference, topic being referred to		answer/acknowledgment of some proposal
RES	result		

APPENDIX C – DE ACCORDING TO CHARLES KRAFT

The cross-cultural perspective on Dynamic Equivalence translation has been most strongly supported by Charles Kraft. He has been an anthropologist, a missionary, and is currently a professor at Fuller Seminary. He probably took the idea of DE in the area of Bible translation further than most writers. In going from an *Original Cultural Matrix* to a *Receptor Cultural Matrix* he proposed six steps:

1. “Linguistic and cultural analysis of the original total situation (including the personal factors)
2. Decoding of the essential elements of the message (not simply of the individual words)
3. *Paraphrasing* the material in such a way as *to make explicit all implicit information*
4. Translating this explicit paraphrase literally into the receptor language
5. Re-encoding the material in the receptor language in such a way as to *make implicit the information that this language requires (allows) to be implicit*
6. Rewriting the material in the appropriate style (forms) of the receptor language to produce a dynamically equivalent effect on the hearers.”¹⁵⁰ (emphasis mine)

Note that the implicit information in step five does not necessarily equate with that in step three. What can be made implicit depends on the receptor culture and language. Kraft’s approach was based on behaviourist psychology popular in the 1970s. He called his approach “Hearer-Oriented Translation,” showing the change in focus of translators from SL text – the traditional focus of translators – to RL hearer.¹⁵¹ He uses the term paraphrase in a technical sense of re-ordering words in a sentence, something any translation will be forced to do, even those claiming formal correspondence,¹⁵² but in fact his methods led to many paraphrases¹⁵³ or *domesticated*¹⁵⁴ translations. The difference between Kraft’s

¹⁵⁰ Charles H. Kraft *Christianity in Culture – A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1979, p275

¹⁵¹ Kraft *ibid.* p262

¹⁵² Especially when the language or cultures differ strongly. For instance in going from Hebrew to a Turkic language the languages differ strongly in that Hebrew is by default VSO (verb-subject-object) whereas Turkic languages are SOV. On top of that Hebrew hardly has a case system and is weakly agglutinating whereas Turkic languages have a robust case system and are strongly agglutinating. For variance between cultures it is possible to site the difference between the ANE and the cultures of Papua New Guinea or the Pacific Rim.

¹⁵³ i.e. a fairly free translation which uses cultural substitutes e.g. Jdg 3:24b אָנֹךְ מְסִיךְ תְּוֹא אֶת־רַגְלֵי בְּחַדְרַת הַמְּקַחָה has been translated as: “perhaps he was using the bathroom” (LB); “He’s probably relieving himself in the rest-room” (The Message); contra. “Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber” (KJV) which is FC but probably unclear to most readers.

¹⁵⁴ “The translation reads as if it were written in the target language. Or, to use other common vocabulary from translation studies, the translation is transparent and fluent, and

understanding of DE and Nida's, coupled with Nida's views on the hearers needing to "feel" the impact of the translation, encouraged Nida to adopt a new description for his model – Functional Equivalence.

the text is domesticated." Philip C. Stine 'Trends In Translation' in *The Bible Translator*, UBS, Vol. 46 No. 1 (January, 1995), p141-146

APPENDIX D – NEW LITERARY CRITICAL APPROACHES

Although Robert Alter's work on the NLCA has been foundational, there have been many other literary critics of the Hebrew Bible who have also contributed greatly, sometimes in areas neither commented on by "The Art of Biblical Narrative" nor Alter's translation of Genesis, though he may hint at them.

Gaps

Meir Sternberg discusses the idea of *gaps* in Hebrew narratives. In 32:30 Jacob asks God's name, but there is no answer; "And Jacob asked and said, 'Tell your name, pray.' And he said, 'Why should you ask my name?' and there he blessed him." Gaps like these create questions, in this case completely unanswered, in the reader's mind. If unanswered they lead to a sense of mystery that the translator should be aware of, and not try to clarify.

Sometimes gaps are filled, but much later in the sequence of actions. Sternberg calls this *gap-filling*; "...not merely gaps but principles of gap-filling are the objects of sequential manipulation, sources of curiosity and surprise, agents in the overall drama of reading."¹⁵⁵

Questions are raised, and much later answered. For example in 25:25 we are told that Esau is born hairy, but only in 27:6-40 do we find out why this is significant in terms of the story of Isaac's family. In keeping track of and maintaining such literary allusions in the story and corresponding translation, the translator helps to preserve the intent of the implied author.¹⁵⁶

Alter is more interested in pointing out the confusing etymological explanations for Esau's name in 25:25 cf. 25:30 ("Esau" vs. "Edom"),¹⁵⁷ though that is probably because he assumes that the reader will remember Esau's crucial hairiness from the earlier story.

Another kind of gap is the *reverse gap*. Isaac's old age in 27:1, for instance, reminds the reader of the happy end that Abraham reached in 25:7-8. But contra-expectation Isaac's old age and consequent blindness lead to problems, and create the opportunity for a good story – the reader knows more than the characters in it, "the blind man's suspicion is our certitude, his gap our fact."¹⁵⁸ Alter succeeds in making the reader aware of this element of the story; "*Rise, pray, sit up*. It is only now that we learn the full extent of Isaac's infirmity: he is not only blind but also bedridden."¹⁵⁹ A good translator will be aware of the emotional response that

¹⁵⁵ Sternberg *op. cit.* p354

¹⁵⁶ The implied author being a hypothetical construct – the omniscient narrator behind the text as we have it.

¹⁵⁷ Alter *op. cit.* p127, 129

¹⁵⁸ Sternberg *op. cit.* p241. Gaps are closely related to repetition. "Epithetic old age thus associated with all the blessings of character and future, it becomes their overt metonymy. Surface and depth appear to establish in concert the type of the Departing Patriarch. So the reader naturally looks forward to the recurrence of this typical precedent in the next generation. But history does not repeat itself... Contrary to expectation, "Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see... and, putting this together with the rest of the facts, the reader intuits Isaac's 'spiritual decline' i.e. we learn something about his character" *ibid.* p349-350

¹⁵⁹ Alter, *op. cit.* footnote p139 *cf.* footnote on 27:1 p137

the story is intended to create in the reader (see the descriptions of FE translations in sections 1. and 3., above), especially in this important area of gaps.

Occasionally translators have been tempted to close gaps. Take, for example, 15:16 “And in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.” One Russian version decided to fill in the gap, using a kind of explicature not condoned by Nida and Taber (see 1.2 above):

<i>World Bible Translation Center translation into Russian</i> ¹⁶⁰	<i>Back-translation of the Russian version into English</i>
Пройдёт четыре поколения, и твой народ вернётся обратно на эту землю, (и тогда они победят аморреев, ибо Я через твой народ накажу живущих здесь аморреев.) Всё это произойдёт в будущем, ибо мера беззаконий аморреев ещё не исполнилась. (Бытие 15.16)	Four generations will pass, and your people will return to this land, (and then they will be victorious over the Amorites, for I, through your people, will punish the Amorites living here.) All this will take place in the future, for the measure of the transgression of the Amorites has not yet been completed. Gen (15:16)

TABLE 8

GEN 15:16 – A FILLED-IN GAP

The translator has assumed that this verse is anachronistic, and also that it contains an ellipsis i.e. some information has been left out. He or she has then acted in order to fill out this ellipsis. But if in fact it is a gap, designed to be filled only in the book of Numbers, the inclusion of the parenthetical information closes the gap, and in so-doing takes some of the interest out of the story. This is not only a pity, it goes beyond the bounds in terms of faithfulness to the original Hebrew text.

Mimesis

This is the sense of reality conveyed by certain language. The biblical writers “find storytelling potential in family matters and some very small deeds indeed; and they frequently tell us things with a smile. What they do is to produce reality, to create an image of it; in most cases it is ordinary human reality, and therefore eternally interesting.”¹⁶¹ The translator needs to be aware of the linguistic keys to this, and make sure these are reproduced in the RL. In Türkmen, for instance, it is often the case that the tense switches from narrative (folk tale?) to present at the peak of a narrative. Choice of vocabulary is important too, as use of high-register or poetic terms in a mimesis-rich narrative may send the wrong signals.

The portrayal of Esau as an earthy character is reinforced by his use of language (see 9.1 above). This adds a certain vividness to the account.

¹⁶⁰ Библия (Современный Перевод Библейских Текстов), Москва 1993, Авторское право 1993 г. Обеспечено, World Bible Translation Center, Fort Worth, Texas, USA

¹⁶¹ Jacob Licht *Storytelling in the Bible* The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1978, p10

At a higher level, Jacob, the deceiver, finally meets his match in Laban, the arch-deceiver. This rings true with life as we experience it, therefore the translator should be aware of this overarching theme within the story of Isaac's family.

Many literary critics are interested in whether biblical narratives are within fiction or non-fiction. It is not necessary to assume that they are fictional in order to be able to carry out literary analysis on them. It is merely necessary to postulate an omniscient narrator, whether human, divine, or a combination of the two. Whether or not the narratives are true is less important than the fact that they *ring true*.¹⁶² Were this not the case, they would not be good stories, and would not communicate to readers.

¹⁶² There are certain stories in the OT that are clearly fables or parables e.g. Jdg 9:8-15; 2Sa 12:1-4

APPENDIX E – PARATACTIC VS. HYPOTACTIC TRANSLATIONS

Take Gen 24:13-14 as an example:

הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל-עֵינַי הַמַּיִם וּבָנוֹת אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר יֹצְאֹת לְשָׂאֵב מַיִם: וְהִנֵּה הַנְּעוּר
אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלַי הַטִּי-נָא כַדָּךְ וְאֶשְׁתֶּה וְאָמַרְתָּ שְׂתֵּה וְגַם-גִּמְלִיךָ אֶשְׁקֶה אֹתָהּ
הַכַּחֲתָ לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיִצְחָק וְיָבֵה אֲדַע כִּי-עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם-אֲדֹנָי:

The mainly paratactic Hebrew SL has given rise to some fairly hypotactic (subordinate) English translations:

See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that **when** I say to a girl, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’--let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.” (NIV, emphasis mine)

Here I am at the well where the young women of the city will be coming to get water. I will say to one of them, ‘Please, lower your jar and let me have a drink.’ **If** she says, ‘Drink, and I will also bring water for your camels,’ may she be the one that you have chosen for your servant Isaac. **If** this happens, I will know that you have kept your promise to my master.” (GNB, emphasis mine)

If a translator were working from one of these (as their main reference, with someone else checking the translation against the SL) it might give rise to some strange translations into other paratactic languages. Alter’s translation is as follows:

“...Here, I am posed by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the town are coming out to draw water. Let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Pray, tip down your jug that I may drink,’ **if** she says, ‘Drink, and your camels, too, I shall water,’ she it is whom You have marked for your servant, for Isaac, and by this I shall know that You have done kindness with my master.” (emphasis mine)

He has kept the parataxis except for the **if**. The issue is how to translate וְהִנֵּה – if literally “and it will be” it might sound as if the servant is ordering God to do something, which is far from the case. Therefore in many languages insertion of “if” is justified.

Gen 24:13-14

This was translated into Türkmen¹⁶³ like this:

<i>Ine, men guýynyň başynda durun.</i>
Here, I am standing at the head of the well.

¹⁶³ This is only the second draft of five, so further changes were made before publication.

Şäheriň gyzlary suw almaga çykýarlar.
The girls of the city are coming out to get water.

Men bir gyza:	«Küýzäňi egniňden düşür-de, maňa bir suw bersene, içeýinle»	diýenimde,
I to a girl:	“Lower your jug from your shoulder now, give me one water please, let me drink”	when I say

ol maňa:	«Al, iç, men seniň düýeleriňi-de suwa ýakaýyn»	diýse,
she to me	“Take, drink, let me water your camels too”	if she says,

men onuň öz guluň Yshagyň kysmatyna ýazanyňdygyna düşünerin.
I will understand that she is written in your servant Isaac’s <i>kismet</i> (fate)

Seniň öz jenabyma rehimdarlyk edýändigine göz ýetirerin».
I will see that you will have extended your compassion to your servant.

This (ignoring the use of *kismet*) is not a bad translation, but it essentially follows the syntax of the English, a mixture of NIV and TEV, rather than the Hebrew. The best way to translate, in such circumstances, is to give the translator a phrase-by-phrase front-translation from Hebrew into English or Russian (or even Türkmen), and then have the translator translate or rephrase each phrase as necessary. The result of that would be a translation that, as closely as possible, matches the style and syntax of the Hebrew. Some advocates of FE¹⁶⁴ prefer a *top-down* approach, where the whole verse is explained to the translator orally, but the translator does not look at any text while drafting the verse. Once the verse is drafted in natural RL, the translator compares it with the source text (and the exegetical advisor compares it with the Hebrew) to check that nothing has been left out. This tends to lead to a

¹⁶⁴ E.g. Katherine Barnwell *Bible Translation – An Introductory Course For Mother-Tongue Translators*, SIL on TW CD

more natural RL text, but has the danger of losing the style and syntax of the Hebrew. This is a particular problem for certain genres of the Old Testament, such as poetic, prophetic and wisdom genres, where the form and meaning of the passage are closely related.

APPENDIX F – FARRELL AND HOYLE – AN ALTERNATIVE SIL SLANT ON RELEVANCE THEORY

There are two applications of Relevance Theory within SIL. Gutt, on the one hand, argues that the addition of explicatures in the text leads to distortion of the message, therefore this information needs to be communicated to the reader in another way, perhaps by use of footnotes, maps, a glossary of terms, or the publication of separate books to help readers and preachers in understanding and explaining God's word. SIL consultants (with experience in South Asia) Tim Farrell and Richard Hoyle, on the other hand, make use of Relevance Theory to argue that explicatures are needed to make the translation optimally relevant. Discussing "make me clean" and "be clean" in Luke 5:12-14, they argue that, since "clean" must mean "ritually clean," it is therefore vital that the translator somehow supply this information:

"If translation is about communication, then it is clearly imperative that the hearer/reader be able to supply all the contextual assumptions necessary for the correct interpretation of the utterance. That is, readers have to be able to find the needed contextual assumptions either from the context, the environment, or from their encyclopedic knowledge. If they cannot do this, then those assumptions must be supplied by the speaker/author/translator, whether within the text or outside it. And if they are not supplied, then there is the likelihood that the reader will derive a wrong interpretation: the leper wanted a bath. Or, worse, if from the reader's point of view the pay-off does not justify the processing effort, the reader will give up trying.

But should the assumptions be supplied inside or outside the text? Since relevance theory is a theory of comprehension, not a theory of communication, it does not specifically address this issue. But it does state that the hearer/reader derives meaning from words (understood in a Saussurean way) plus encyclopedic knowledge. In the light of this theory, then, there are two ways a message might be communicated to people whose contextual assumptions do not match those of the original audience. Either the translator supplies the necessary assumptions in the text so the hearers/readers can correctly process it with their existing encyclopedic knowledge, or he adds them to the encyclopedic knowledge of the hearers/readers in some other way."¹⁶⁵

In order to answer this question they look further at relevance theory:

"According to relevance theory, the processing effort required to process such unnatural utterances is often felt by the hearer to be greater than the contextual effects derived, that is, greater than the benefits derived from new information, strengthening of previous assumptions, or contradiction of previous assumptions. So even if the utterance seems to be relevant, the hearer may give up processing it simply due to the fact that the effort required outweighs the benefit gained. Sperber and Wilson (1986:124) explain: 'Processing effort is a negative factor: other things being equal, the greater the processing effort, the lower the relevance.'"¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Farrell, Tim and Hoyle, Richard *Translating Implicit Information in the Light of Saussurean, Relevance, and Cognitive Theories* Notes on Translation Vol. 9 No. 1, 1995, SIL, Dallas, p1-15 and on TW

¹⁶⁶ Farrell and Hoyle, *ibid.* on TW

Therefore, they argue, in order to keep the effort required low, the explication must be in the text rather than in a footnote or elsewhere. This is their suggested translation of v 12, with the ESV in parallel for easy comparison:

<i>Farrell and Hoyle's Translation</i>	<i>ESV</i>
<p>¹² While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. <i>Because of his leprosy he was ritually unclean and an untouchable.</i> When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can cure me and make me ritually clean."¹⁶⁷ (emphasis mine)</p>	<p>¹² While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." ESV</p>

TABLE 9

MRK 5:12

Notice that a whole sentence has been added, as well as one or two words or phrases. Is this really justifiable? Does RT really support such modifications to the translated text? Gutt would argue that it does not.

¹⁶⁷ Farrell and Hoyle, *ibid.* on TW

APPENDIX G –KEY TERMS TRANSLATED CONCORDANTLY

Key Word – Concor-dant	English Gloss	Alter's Translation	Comments	Ref. in Gen (bold shows ref. in Story of Jacob)
אֶבֶן	stone	stone ¹⁶⁸		2:12; 11:3; 28:11; 28:18; 28:22; 29:2; 29:3; 29:8; 29:10; 31:45; 31:46; 35:14 ; 49:24
אֲדָמָה	soil, earth	earth		1:25... 28:14; 28:15 ; 47:18; 47:19...
אֱמֶת	faithfulness , reliability	steadfastly (done)		24:27,48,49; 32:11 ; 42:16; 47:29
אָרַר	to curse	to curse	<i>the verb קָלַל is not used in this story contra 12:3</i>	3:14; 3:17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25; 12:3; 27:29 ; 49:7
בְּכוֹר	firstborn	firstborn		10:15; 22:21; 25:13; 27:19; 27:32; 35:23; 36:15 ; 38:6; 38:7; 41:51; 43:33; 46:8; 48:14; 48:18; 49:3
בְּכֻרָה	birthright	birthright	a pun on בְּרָכָה	4:4; 25:31; 25:32; 25:33; 25:34; 27:36 ; 43:33
בָּרַךְ	to bless	to bless		1:22,28... 25:11; 26:3,4,12,24,29; 27:4,7,10,19,23,25,27,29,30,31,33,34,38,41 ; 28:1,3,6,14; 30:27,30; 32:1,27,30; 35:9 ; 39:5 ...
בְּרָכָה	blessing	blessing		12:2; 27:12,35,36,38,41; 28:4; 33:11 ; 39:5; 49:25,26,28
כַּרְתַּת בְּרִית	to 'cut' a covenant	to seal a pact	<i>fairly idiomatic</i> ¹⁶⁹	6:18... 21:27,32; 26:28; 31:44
גּוֹי	people, nation	nation		10:5, 20, 31f; 12:2; 15:14; 17:4ff, 16, 20; 18:18; 20:4; 21:13, 18; 22:18; 25:23; 26:4; 35:11 ; 46:3; 48:19
גִּיר	to sojourn	to sojourn		12:10; 19:9; 20:1; 21:23,34; 26:3; 32:5; 35:27 ; 47:4
זָבַח זָבַח	to sacrifice a sacrifice	to offer a sacrifice		31:54
זָרַע	seed	seed	<i>unusually concordant (most translations use 'seed' and 'descendants' according to context)</i>	1:11,12,29; 3:15; 4:25; 7:3; 8:22; 9:9; 12:7; 13:15,16; 15:3,5,13,18; 16:10; 17:7,8,9,10,12,19; 19:32,34; 21:12,13; 22:17,18; 24:7,60; 26:3,4,24; 28:4,13,14; 32:13; 35:12 ; 38:8,9; 46:6,7; 47:19,23,24; 48:4,11,19

¹⁶⁸ Alter notes "stone" as a concrete *Leitwort*, 'The Art of Biblical Narrative' p180. Certainly the term regularly recurs whenever Jacob has some kind of supernatural encounter.

¹⁶⁹ i.e. translating a phrase using a phrase, rather than word-for-word

חֶסֶד	love; loyalty	kindness		19:19; 20:13; 21:23; 24:12,14,27,49; 32:11 ; 39:21; 40:14; 47:29
חַן	favour/favor		(those in italics dealt with below)	6:8; 18:3; 19:19,21; 30:27; 32:6; 33:8,10,15; 34:11 ; 39:4,21; 40:16; 41:16; 47:29; 50:4
מָצָא חַן בְּעֵינַי	to find favour in the eyes of 1. God 2. a human being	to find favor in the eyes of... (all in sense 2.)		6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 30:27; 32:6; 33:8, 10, 15; 34:11 ; 39:4; 47:25, 29; 50:4
נָכַר	to recognise	to recognize	Alter calls this a 'crucial verb' p149fn ¹⁷⁰	27:23; 31:32 ; 37:32,33; 38:25,26; 42:7,7,8,8
יָצַק שֶׁמֶן	to pour oil	to pour oil		28:18-22
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה	in LORD's presence, before the LORD	in the LORD's presence	<i>less ambiguous than the possibly spatial 'before the LORD'</i>	10:9,9; 13:10; 18:22; 19:13,27; 24:52; 27:7
מַלְאָךְ	messenger; angel	messenger	<i>unusually concordant (most translations vary the TE)</i>	16:7,9,10,11; 19:1,15; 21:17; 22:11,15; 24:7,40; 28:12; 31:11; 32:2,4,7 ; 48:16
מִשְׁמַרְתֵּי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹּתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי	my charge, commandments, statutes and laws	'my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my teachings'	<i>Heb has to repeat the possessive, Eng does not</i>	26:5
מִשְׁפָּחָה	family, clan	clan		8:19; 10:5,18,20,31,32; 12:3,3; 28:14 ; 36:40
מָשַׁח	anoint (a pillar)	to anoint		31:13
נָסַךְ נֶסֶךְ	to pour out a drink offering	to offer libation	<i>translation null?</i> ¹⁷¹	35:14
עֵד	witness	witness		31:44,48,50,52

¹⁷⁰ cf. Alter *The Art of Biblical Narrative* p9-11

¹⁷¹ i.e. there is a danger that this will not be understood by readers

עֵתֶק	to move on	to pull up stakes	<i>conveys the fact that they were living in tents – ‘struck camp’ better?</i>	12:8; 26:22
פֶּרָה	to be/make fruitful	to be fruitful		1:22,28; 8:17; 9:1,7; 17:6,20; 26:22; 28:3; 35:11 ; 41:52; 47:27; 48:4; 49:22,22
קָהָל	assembly; company	assembly		28:3 ; 48:4
רָבָה	to multiply	to multiply		1:22,22,28; 3:16; 8:17; 9:1,7,7; 16:10,10; 17:2,20; 21:20; 22:17,17; 26:4,24; 28:3; 35:11 ; 38:12; 41:49; 43:34; 47:27; 48:4
רִיחַ	spirit	-	KJV: grief of <i>mind</i>	1:2; 3:8; 6:3,17; 7:15,22; 8:1; 26:35 ; 41:8,38; 45:27
רָמָה	to deceive	to deceive		29:25
שָׁחָה	to bow down; to worship	to bow (before, down)	<i>often used as part of a phrase e.g. 33:3 ‘bowed to the ground’</i>	18:2; 19:1; 22:5; 23:7; 23:12; 24:26; 24:48; 24:52; 27:29; 33:3; 33:6; 33:7 ; 37:7; 37:9; 37:10; 42:6; 43:26; 43:28; 47:31; 48:12; 49:8
תּוֹלְדוֹת	descendants, genealogy	lineage	<i>see footnote in Alter – lineage is left here as a contrast with 12,13</i>	2:4, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:13, 25:19 , 36:1, 36:9, 37:2
תָּם	sound, wholesome ; KJV ‘plain’ NIV ‘quiet’	simple		25:27

Alter has managed to keep many Key Terms concordant. Given the semantic range of some of these terms, this is quite impressive. Occurrences not in bold have not been analysed, however, so it is possible that outside the Story of Isaac’s Family the Hebrew term is not translated concordantly. Note that there is no direct TE of רִיחַ in 26:35.

Excurses: Sense and Referent

For nouns, it is worth distinguishing between the sense and the referent of the term. The term **עַם**, for instance, might *refer* to different groups of people, but in Hebrew the *sense* of the term might remain the same, because of its wide semantic range. In English, however, it might be impossible to find a term which can be used for such varying *referents*, and yet keep the same sense. E.g. the GNB frequently translates terms according to their referent rather than their sense. **מִקְדָּשׁ** for instance, is translated “temple” (Exo 15:18) “sacred tent” (Exo 25:8) and “the place where I am worshipped” Lev 19:30. The RSV mainly translates the term as “sanctuary.” **מִשְׁכָּן** is also (confusingly) translated “sacred tent” by the GNB in many places e.g. Exo 25:9, whereas the RSV invariably keeps to the technical term “tabernacle” throughout. The two Hebrew terms **מִקְדָּשׁ** and **מִשְׁכָּן** often refer to the same object, but rationalising them in this way loses the sense of the Hebrew. **מִקְדָּשׁ** “holy place/thing” and **מִשְׁכָּן** “dwelling place” activate different frames and should ideally be translated using separate terms, unless there are good reasons not to do so e.g. as a result of field testing the translation. See “unclear referent” below, however.

APPENDIX H – DE REGT’S ANALYSIS OF ALTER’S WORD ORDER

Some examples adapted from de Regt’s analysis¹⁷² will help here. Gen 25:31, 33 (with Alter’s translation following, my emphasis) show how the salient information is shifted to the right:

מְכַרָּה כִּיּוֹם אֶת־בְּכֹרְתְךָ לִי

“Sell now your birthright *to me*”

Which seems to have “now” in the wrong place.

הַשְּׁבַעָה לִי כִּיּוֹם

“Swear to me *now*”

Which works well in English. Whereas in 35:12 we find:

וְלִזְרַעְךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

“*And to your seed after you* I will give the land”

Which has the newer information at the beginning of the sentence, prior to the verb.

Both 27:33 and 32:11 show restrictive and contrastive focus:

גַּם־בְּרִוּךְ יִהְיֶה

“...*now* blessed he stays.”

כִּי בְּמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה

“For *with my staff* I crossed this Jordan...”

De Regt’s argument is that if Alter attempts to keep Hebrew word order, with the assumption that any topic, focus, and salient information will be in the correct place in English, he is mistaken. Salient information can and often is left to the end of the sentence in English. But the part with restrictive and contrastive focus is normally fronted, though there are exceptions.¹⁷³ So 25:31, 33 should rather have been:

Now sell me your birthright. Or: Now sell your birthright – to me

¹⁷² De Regt, Lénart *Hebrew Syntactical inversions and their Literary Equivalence in Robert Alter’s Translation of Genesis* unpublished paper from seminar on Hebrew Discourse Features, Wycliffe Centre, UK, 2002

¹⁷³ A combination of position in the sentence and intonation might highlight a word, but there are usually fairly clear signals earlier in the sentence that this is taking place e.g. “Not only did you spill all the milk, you also broke the milk jug!” is a well-known construction of the “not only... but also” form which emphasises the second phrase and would normally be read with an intonation-pattern that emphasises *milk jug*.

Swear now to me. Or: Swear to me – now.

37:4 and 34:28-29a show that contrastive focus has been fronted *and* salient information has been shifted to the right:

כִּי־אָתּוֹ אָהַב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו

“it was he their father loved more than all his brothers”

אֶת־צֹאֲנָם וְאֶת־בְּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר־בְּעִיר וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקְחוּ:
וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵילָם וְאֶת־כָּל־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׂיהֶם שָׁבוּ וַיָּבִיאוּ

“Their sheep and their cattle and their donkeys, what was in the town and in the field, they took, and all their wealth, and all their young ones, and their wives they took captive...”

The former of which seems to work reasonably well. If the latter is a fronting of the element in focus, then the implication is that the sons should not have taken this plunder. Alter’s translation, however, does not capture the sense of the Hebrew, or sound natural in English.¹⁷⁴

34:31 also has fronted contrastive focus:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכּוֹזֵנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אָחִינוּ

“And they said, ‘Like a whore should our sister be treated?’”

Where, “Should our sister be treated *like a whore*?” would be much more natural. Without use of italics, which shows intonation or sentence-level stress, “Should our sister be treated in such a way, like a whore?” or “Should our sister be treated like a common whore?” would be better.

The contrast in 6:9 is not noticed in Alter’s translation:

אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ

“Noah walked with God”

Better: “With God Noah walked” (de Regt, and the expected Alter) or “It was with God that Noah walked” (mine).

A good example of a topical participant is *Laban* in 31:19

וּלְבָן הָלַךְ לִגְזֹז אֶת־צֹאֲנוֹ

“And Laban had gone to shear his flocks...”

¹⁷⁴ Both 34:28-29a and 34:31 (below) sound like an English as a second-language speaker who has an SOV mother-tongue as found in Turkic languages.

The SL syntactical inversion achieves two purposes – to put the topical participant first, and leave the salient information to the end. Alter’s translation leaves the English, although matching the *X-qatal* Hebrew, in its usual SVO (subject-verb-object) word-order, so the reader is left with few clues, though the topic is sentence-initial as expected. Alter misunderstands the purpose of the *X-qatal* here. It is showing “iterative or durative” action.¹⁷⁵ Given the next sentence (“and Rachel stole the household gods that were her father’s”) one would have expected something like “While Laban...” in English (or as NJB “Rachel in the meanwhile...” in the *following* sentence).

Notice that none of de Regt’s examples have *wayyiqtol* verb forms as the main form under consideration. Presumably, with Muraoka,¹⁷⁶ he avoids them due to the fact that *wayyiqtol* verb has, by definition, to be the first element in the phrase.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Heimerdinger *op cit.* p22

¹⁷⁶ Joüon, Muraoka *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* Vol II, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma, 1991, p390-391. For a more detailed analysis see Alviero Niccacci *Analysis of Biblical Narrative* pp175-198 in Bergen, Robert ed. ‘Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics’ SIL and Eisenbrauns, USA, 1994.

¹⁷⁷ Heimerdinger *op cit.* p25, though it is important to realise that individual verbs are hard to analyse. Hebrew *wayyiqtol* verbs come in chains, and the *X-qatal* construction is used to break that chain in order to signify a break in the narrative flow.

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