



The Functionalist Approach to Translation and its Application to Translation Management

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the application of the functionalist approach to translation management. The functionalist approach, which emphasizes the purpose and function of a translation within its target context, provided valuable insights for managing translation processes effectively. The research employed a literature-based approach to examine existing literature on the functionalist approach and to examine how its principles can be integrated into translation management practices. The findings highlight how focusing on the functional needs of the target audience and context enhances the efficiency and quality of translation projects. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how functionalist theories can inform and improve translation management strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Translation studies have evolved significantly over the years as an interdisciplinary academic field.¹ J.S. Holmes is recognized as the first scholar to have provided a framework for this academic endeavor.² In his work, Holmes divided Translation studies into descriptive and applied translation studies.³ The former deals with analysis of translation phenomena; including the process, norms, and strategies used in translation.⁴ The latter focuses on the practical application of translation theories and methodologies in real-world contexts.⁵ It includes such activities as training of translators, provision of translation aid and translation criticism.

Scholarship in Translation studies has yielded various approaches to understand and analyses the complex process of translating texts from one language to another. Among these approaches, the functionalist approach, as advocated by scholars like Christiane Nord, has gained prominence for its emphasis on the function and purpose of translation within specific communicative situations. This

¹ Jacob A. Naude, "An Overview Of Recent Developments In Translation Studies With Special Reference To The Implications For Bible Translation," *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 2, (2002): 44-69, 45.

² J.S. Holmes, "The name and nature of translation studies," In *Van den Broeck R. Translated! Papers on literary translation and translation studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 67-80.

³ Holmes, "The name and nature of translation studies," 67-80.

⁴ Naude, "An Overview Of Recent Developments," 44-69.

⁵ Holmes, "The name and nature of translation studies," 67-80.

paper delves into the functionalist approach to translation, examining its historical foundations, theoretical underpinnings, and conceptual aspects. Additionally, it compares the features of the functionalist approach with those of linguistic-based theories of translation, highlighting their differences and similarities. The paper then explores how the functionalist approach addresses the perennial problem of equivalence in translation.

Beyond theoretical exploration, the paper also discusses the practical application of the functionalist approach in the management of Bible translation projects. Here, it delineates the role of the functionalist framework at various stages of a translation project, from initiation to assessment, and elucidates how project managers can leverage the approach to facilitate effective collaboration among different stakeholders involved in the translation process. Through a comprehensive examination of the functionalist approach and its practical implications in Bible translation projects, the paper aims to provide insights into the multifaceted nature of translation and its management in real-world contexts.

The paper is a literary research that has no empirical component. Data was obtained from primary literary sources as well as secondary ones including, monographs, journal articles, and dissertations. Information from these sources was critically analysed and deductions were made. The central argument of this essay is that the functionalist approach to translation, as expounded by Nord and other proponents, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing translation projects, particularly in the context of Bible translation.

Translation Studies prior to the Functionalist Model

Throughout history, translators (including Bible translators) have argued about what the key determinants of translation choices should be. As this paper focuses on functionalist models of translation, it is imperative to consider some of the translation approaches that predate the functionalist approach. With the limited space and time, this paper considers the linguistic approach as a way to place the study in the right historical perspective.

Linguistic Era

Naudé has noted that translations prior to the Second World War were based on “philological comparison of texts.”⁶ In other words, translators primarily analysed and compared the linguistic and textual features of the original and target texts in order to produce translations. However, the mid-20th century saw a remarkable shift in translation theory towards a linguistic equivalence approach. Eugene Nida emerged as a prominent figure whose ideas greatly influenced both secular and biblical scholars.⁷ Nadia attributes this shift to two factors.⁸ The first factor is the utilization of the swiftly advancing field of linguistics in the mid-20th century and the second is the advent of machine translation. By nature, machine translation could not be done without linguistic analyses. Other notable contributors to translation theory from a linguistic standpoint during this time included Roman Osipovich Jakobson (1896–1982), Jiří Levý, and J. C. Catford.⁹ This section outlines the significant contributions of these key figures, with focus on Nida.

Jakobson, who was both a literary theorist and linguist in the Prague School, made significant contributions to the field of comparative literature. He collaborated with scholars across various linguistic disciplines, from phonology to literary theory, across multiple European languages to develop the field of translation studies. In his influential 1959 essay titled “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” Jakobson introduced three concepts: intralingual translation, interlingual translation,

⁶ Jacob A. Naudé, “Translation Studies and Bible Translation,” *Acta Theologica* 1, (2000): 1-27, 5.

⁷ Eugene A. Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” In: *Translation. Applications and research* edited by Richard W. Brislin. pp. 47-91 (New York: Gardner Press, 1976), 47-91.

⁸ Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” 69.

⁹ Andy Cheung, “A History of Twentieth Century Translation Theory and its Application for Bible Translation,” *Journal of Translation. Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Journal of ISS* 9 (1), (2013): 1-15, 3.

and intersemiotic translation.¹⁰ Intralingual translation is when one interprets verbal signs within the same language, while interlingual translation has to do with translation between languages and reflects the traditional understanding of translation. However, it was intersemiotic translation that represented a true innovation. Jakobson's work on intersemiotic translation laid the groundwork for contemporary studies in translating and interpreting, particularly in incorporating nonverbal elements, which holds potential for audio/visual Bible translation projects.¹¹

Jiří Levý, another scholar from the Prague School, became prominent in the area of translation studies for his influential works such as "The Art of Translation" (1963) and "Translation as a Decision Process" (1967).¹² Levý's approach to translation stands out due to its strong focus on the translator's role, the translation process, and the form of the translated text. In Levý's view, translation is a performing art, wherein maintaining the literary value of the original work is paramount.¹³ In this enterprise, preserving the communicative aspects and significant formal properties of the foreign writer's text is crucial. He argues that the artistic elements of a literary work can be transferred to the target language while retaining their original value, independent of the content, world, or language of the source text.¹⁴

For Levý, the goal of translation is to faithfully convey the original message while also recreating it in the target language.¹⁵ He stresses the importance of adherence to the original text and cautions against producing translations that deviate from it. Levý advocates for preserving certain formal and fundamental features of the text but suggests that non-functional formal structures may not always need to be retained. He categorized translation approaches into "illusionist" and "anti-illusionist." He, however, preferred the former which aims for translations that seamlessly integrate into the literary milieu of the target culture.¹⁶ Levý emphasized the need to maintain the aesthetic impact and semantic values of the original work in translation.¹⁷ His ideas laid the foundation for translation concepts like functionalism and relevance theory, resonating with Eugene Nida's theories.¹⁸

Nida, a prominent American linguist and translator, is best known for his concept of dynamic equivalence (later termed functional equivalence) which remains a cornerstone of translation studies.¹⁹ Nida's significant contributions include his comprehensive works, "Toward a Science of Translating" (1964) and "The Theory and Practice of Translation" (1969), which made him a prominent figure in translation studies in the 1960s.²⁰ In these works, Nida approaches Bible translation with a more scientific perspective that draws on linguistic studies of the time.²¹ Nida's theory rests on the premise that languages exhibit greater agreement on fundamental linguistic units, which he terms "kernels," than on more complex structures.²² This, according to Naudé, suggests that simplifying grammatical structures to the kernel level facilitates easier transfer with minimal distortion.²³ This assumption underlines Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber's three-stage perspective of the translation process as: analysis, transfer and restructuring.²⁴

To arrive at his theory, Nida incorporates concepts from semantics, pragmatics, and Chomsky's theories on synthetic structure. He shifts from the old idea that words had fixed meanings

¹⁰ Roman Jakobson, "On linguistic aspects of translation," In Lawrence Venuti (ed.). *The Translation Studies Reader*. Second edition pp. 138-143 (New York: Routledge, 2004), 139.

¹¹ Jakobson, "On linguistic aspects of translation," 139.

¹² Cheung, "A History of Twentieth Century Translation Theory, 5.

¹³ Lokman Tanrikulu, "Translation Theories," *Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Journal of ISS* 7(1), (2017): 97-108, 100.

¹⁴ Tanrikulu, "Translation Theories," 100.

¹⁵ Tanrikulu, "Translation Theories," 100.

¹⁶ Cheung, "A History of Twentieth Century Translation Theory, 5.

¹⁷ Cheung, "A History of Twentieth Century Translation Theory, 5.

¹⁸ Cheung, "A History of Twentieth Century Translation Theory, 5.

¹⁹ Nida, "A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation," 47-91.

²⁰ Nida, "A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation," 47-91.

²¹ Nida, "A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation," 47-91.

²² Nida, "A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation," 47-91.

²³ Naudé, "Translation Studies," 5.

²⁴ Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The theory and practice of translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 33.

to explore various scientific methods for understanding meaning. He categorizes meaning into three; namely, linguistic, referential, and emotive (cognitive) components. Nida also employs semantic structure analysis to address ambiguity and cultural distinctions, particularly useful for bridging gaps between different languages.

According to Naudé linguistic approaches to translation evaluated the quality of translation—whether good, bad, or indifferent—based on equivalence (“similarity”, “analogy” or “correspondence”) between the source and translated texts.²⁵ Accordingly, Nida’s theory is deeply rooted in the concepts of “Formal Equivalence” and “Dynamic Equivalence.”²⁶ Formal Equivalence (or “literal” or “word-for-word” translation) tries as much as possible to maintain the structure, grammar, and vocabulary of the source text in the translating text (TT).²⁷ The emphasis is on fidelity to the original wording, even if the resulting translation is awkward or lacks clarity. Dynamic Equivalence (or “functional” or “thought-for-thought” translation) focuses on carrying the meaning and intent of the source text rather than strictly maintaining the words, order and structure of the source text. Translators using this approach may modify the language, structure, and cultural references of the source text to ensure clarity and relevance for the target audience. Dynamic equivalence aims at evoking a similar response in target readers as in source text readers.

Nida argues for the prioritization of meaning over stylistic fidelity.²⁸ This principle has influenced translation theory beyond mere word-for-word correspondence. Going by these principles, a successful translation is one that produces an equivalent effect rather than a literal rendering. Nida’s principles are built around four fundamental requirements for effective translation; namely, coherence, conveying the original spirit and style, natural expression, and eliciting a comparable response.²⁹ He argues that it is the Dynamic Equivalence model of translation that fulfils these criteria.³⁰ Nida’s theories sparked debates but have also left a profound impact on scholars worldwide, including Peter Newmark (1981) in the UK, by introducing a reader-centred approach to translation theory.³¹

The concept of equivalence has some problems. First, there is ambiguity and lack of precision in defining equivalence.³² Different interpretations by different scholars and translators as to what “equivalence” actually means have led to confusion and inconsistency in its application. Secondly, the equivalence theory downplays the cultural and linguistic differences between source and target societies in the translation process.³³ It may oversimplify complex cultural concepts or even fail to capture the full essence of idiomatic expressions. Thirdly, the equivalence theory is criticised for over-elevating the source text.³⁴ In this model, the source text is considered “untouchable.”

After years of dominating Translation studies, Nida’s theory of equivalence gave way to other theories, especially the functionalist approach. The next section focuses on this model of translation.

The Functionalist Approach to Translation

As noted previously, before the 1970s equivalence theories remained the undisputed standard in translation. However, scholars continued to grapple with the shortcomings associated with this approach. Mary Snell-Hornby eventually argued that the equivalence theory is problematic, at least

²⁵ Naudé, “Translation Studies,” 6.

²⁶ Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” 47-91.

²⁷ Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” 47-91.

²⁸ Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” 47-91.

²⁹ Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” 47-91.

³⁰ Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” 47-91.

³¹ Nida, “A framework for the analysis and evaluation of theories of translation,” 47-91.

³² Dorothy Kenny, *Equivalence* In Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha (eds). *The Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* Second edition, (London: Routledge, 2009):96

³³ Andy Cheung, “Functionalism and Foreignisation: Applying Skopos Theory to Bible Translation” (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011), 89-90.

³⁴ Cheung, “Functionalism,” 96.

for two reasons.³⁵ Firstly, the term itself is imprecise and poorly defined. Secondly, the term creates a false impression of balance between languages, which is seldom achieved beyond vague approximations. This situation resulted in the search for a model that can deal with the challenges inherent in the equivalence theory. The search for a new translation approach yielded two novel theories aimed at redirecting focus from the source text to the target text. One was an empirically-driven descriptive analysis of translations within their target culture, while the other was the functionalist approach. The functionalist approach (or functionalism) was, therefore, a reaction to the source language emphasis of “equivalence-based linguistic approaches,” which viewed translation as a “code-switching operation.”³⁶

The Cultural Turn

From the 1980s, translation scholars began to view translation through social and political lenses. This shift coincided with the emergence of the “cultural turn” and the increasing interdisciplinary developments in the humanities and social sciences.³⁷ The “cultural turn” signifies a shift to focus more on cultural traditions, history, and context. This change happened at the same time as cultural studies became more popular.³⁸ In translation studies, the cultural turn represents the shift from a formalist and linguistic translation approach to one that emphasizes extra-textual factors and cross-cultural perspectives.³⁹ Consequently, translation was viewed not solely in terms of textual relations but also as a complex process embedded in socio-cultural contextsh.⁴⁰ Thus, the cultural turn placed significant emphasis on the importance of the target culture in the translator's mindset.⁴¹ This contributed to the emergence of the functional model studies.

Katharina Reiss's Typology of Texts

The roots of functionalist translation methods trace back to early twentieth-century Germany, where they were pioneered. While German functionalism holds significant importance in translation history, its development was gradual. In the late 1970s, German translators further refined functionalist approaches, which had their foundations in earlier translation practices, particularly in literary and Biblical translation. German linguist and translation scholar Katharina Reiss introduced the idea of typology of texts by which she classified texts into three types based on Karl Bühler's communication model: informative, expressive, and operative.⁴² Reiss introduced aesthetics into her typology by dividing texts into these three groups, which then determine the type of translation to be performed—either content-oriented or form-oriented.⁴³ The informative text type is characterized by the straightforward conveyance of facts, information, and opinions. The language utilized for transmission is logical or referential, emphasizing the content or subject matter. The expressive text type emphasises creative expression and aesthetic language use and the author's style and message form. In contrast, the operative text type aims to elicit specific behavioral responses from the reader, often persuading or appealing to them to act in a particular way. In addition, there are audio-medial texts (including films, visual, and spoken advertisements) that complement the other text types by incorporating visual images, and music to enhance communication.

³⁵ Mary Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 21.

³⁶ Christine Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997), 7.

³⁷ Naude, “An Overview Of Recent Developments,” 44.

³⁸ Naude, “An Overview Of Recent Developments,” 45.

³⁹ Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies*, 47.

⁴⁰ T.Hermans, “Norms and the Determination of Translation: A Theoretical Framework In *Translation, Power, Subversion*,” Edited by Roman Álvarez and Maria Carmen Africa Vidal Vidal (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996), 26.

⁴¹ Cheung, “Functionalism,” 60.

⁴² Katharina Reiss, “Text types, translation types and translation assessment,” In Translated by A. Chesterman Andrew Chesterman (ed). *Readings in translation theory* (Helsinki: Oy Finn Lectura, 1989), 105-115.

⁴³ Reiss, *The Critique of Translations: Its Possibilities and Limits* translated from German by C. Bocquet (Artois: Artois University Press, 2002), 32.

Reiss' typology aims to provide a methodology for an objective critique of translations to evaluate their quality. Her method links the type of text to the nature of the translation "equivalence" to be produced.⁴⁴ For predominantly informative texts, the primary goal is to convey the content. For expressive texts, which focus on the sender, the aesthetic concerns of the original author should be respected to convey the form as well. For motivational texts, which are receiver-centered, the translator aims to provoke the same reactions in the target audience as the source text intended in the original audience.⁴⁵

The distinction between linguistic-oriented models of equivalence and Vermeer's functionalist model lies in their differing perspectives on the source text. Linguistic-oriented models consider the source text as a norm; the models judge the acceptability of a translation based on its equivalence to the source.⁴⁶ Conversely, Vermeer's approach views a translation as successful when it functions effectively within the target culture. In his approach, what the translation is expected to achieve in the target culture is a key determinant of which dimensions of the source text need to be transferred.⁴⁷ As a result, the original text becomes less important as the main measure of equivalence

Hans J. Vermeer's Functionalism

Hans J. Vermeer's contribution to functionalism is outstanding. According to Vermeer, all translational activities should be regarded as purposeful actions, each with its own objective or intention. He contends since the source text (ST) is crafted for a specific context within the source culture (which may differ from that of the target culture), the translation should be tailored to fulfill the intended purpose in the target culture (remaining aligned with and influenced by the source culture).⁴⁸ As opposed to equivalence-based theories, where the source text serves as the ultimate benchmark and equivalence is paramount, functional theories prioritise the purpose or impact of the target text.⁴⁹

Vermeer collaborated with Reiss to discuss the Skopos Theory in the 1984 publication *General Foundations of Translation Theory*. The first part presents the theoretical foundations and core principles of the Skopos theory as a comprehensive framework for both translation and interpreting. This was written by Vermeer. The second part, written by Reiss, integrates her equivalence-based approach into the Skopos framework as a specific theory. This integration, along with the alphabetical order of the authors' names, has led to the common misconception—especially among newcomers to translation studies—that Katharina Reiss founded the Skopos Theory. The works of Reiss and Vermeer show that the functionalist approach redirects focus from mere words and their meanings to the intended function of translation within its societal context of production. What holds significance for the translator is the role of the translation within the target culture, rather than its function within the source culture.⁵⁰ Thus, functionalist theories analyze translation through the lens of text function.

Among these approaches, the most prominent is the Skopos theory. The word "Skopos" derives from Greek, meaning "purpose, intent, goal, aim, and function." The Skopos theory originated from Vermeer and Reiss in the earlier period and Christiane Nord in later years.

⁴⁴ Reiss, *The Critique of Translation*, 32.

⁴⁵ Reiss, *The Critique of Translation*, 32.

⁴⁶ Jacob A. Naude, "From submissiveness to agency: An overview of developments in translation studies and some implications for language practice in Africa," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 29(3), (2011): 223–241, 229.

⁴⁷ Naude, "From submissiveness to agency," 229.

⁴⁸ Hans J. Vermeer, "Scopos and Commission in Translational Action" translated by Andrew Chesterman In *The Translation Studies Reader* edited by Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 1989), 229.

⁴⁹ Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies*, 54.

⁵⁰ Isaac Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2022), 96.

Justa Holz-Mänttari's Translational Action Theory

Around the same period, Justa Holz-Mänttari, a German translation scholar and educator in Finland, proposed a model that builds upon Vermeer's Skopos theory. Holz-Mänttari arrived at his theory by expanding the functionalist principles propounded by Vermeer and argued that translation is a model of "translational action." This model views translation as facilitating functional communication across cultural barriers rather than merely translating words or texts. According to Justa Holz-Mänttari the process involves guiding intended cooperation to enable effective communication. She directs the translation process toward action theory.⁵¹

The "translational action" model pictures the translator as a "messenger" who plays a central role in the production of a translation.⁵² This model underscores the significance of all actors who contribute to the translation process and highlights the translator's expertise in selecting the appropriate translation for a given text. It recognizes that there is not just one correct translation; instead, translators have a variety of options to choose from. The translator must pick the most appropriate option considering the context and purpose of the translation.⁵³

The above survey gives the historical and theoretical background that shaped Christine Nord's view about the Skopos theory which is outlined in the next section.

Nord's Model of Functionalism

Informed by the works of Reiss, Vermeer and Holz-Mänttari, Christiane Nord adopts a functionalist perspective on translation and advocates strongly for Skopos Theory through numerous scholarly works.⁵⁴ Nord arrives at her model by integrating Reiss' textual analysis with Vermeer's functional aspects. She also incorporated the various translation actors proposed by Holz-Mänttari. With this, she arrives at a general and functionalist model that is practical, pragmatic, and purposeful.⁵⁵ She defines translation as a purposeful human activity.⁵⁶ She addresses the criticisms directed at linguistic-based approaches and highlights their neglect of pragmatic and cultural dimensions.⁵⁷

Nord divides the purpose of translation into two components: the author's intention and the text's function for the recipient.⁵⁸ The greater the cultural and expectation differences between the author and recipient, the more crucial this differentiation becomes. Translation evaluation is relative, based on how well the text serves the recipient's needs rather than adhering strictly to the source. This assessment is relevant because it relates to the intended purpose of the translation. The Skopos Theory operates on two assumptions; namely, translation is determined by the purpose and the purpose varies according to the target culture's needs. The decisions the translator makes in shaping a target text are determined by the expectations, norms, conventions, and requirements of the receptor community.

In her earlier works, Nord used variations like "scopos" and "scope" instead of "skopos".⁵⁹ This caused confusion among English readers. However, in later works, these variants were abandoned in alignment with the standard terminology in translation theory. Nord introduces two subcomponents of skopos; namely, intention and function. Here, intention refers to the translator's goal; function has to do with how the target community perceives the achieved skopos. Ideally,

⁵¹ Justa Holz-Mänttari, "Translatorisches Handeln. Theorie und Methode" (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia. Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, 1984), 7-8

⁵² Belkacemi Hafida, "Functionalist Approaches to Translation: Strengths and Weaknesses," *The Algerian Journal of Humanities* 1(2),(2020): 23-37, 29.

⁵³ Hafida, "Functionalist Approaches," 29.

⁵⁴ Christine Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997), 41-50.

⁵⁵ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 41-50.

⁵⁶ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 1.

⁵⁷ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 14.

⁵⁸ Christine Nord, *Text Analysis and Translation: Theoretical Foundations, Method, and Didactic Application of Translation-Relevant Text Analysis* (Heidelberg: Julius Groo, 2009), 53.

⁵⁹ Christine Nord, *Text analysis in translation: theory, methodology, and didactic application of a model for translation-oriented text analysis* (Amsterdam/New York, NY: Rodopi, 1991), 72.

intention and function should match.⁶⁰ However, since these definitions diverge from traditional functionalist terminology they had limited use in scholarly works. Most discussions on functionalist theory use terms like purpose, aim, function, and intention interchangeably with *skopos*. As such, this paper follows this common practice, treating these terms as synonyms.

Before the Skopos Theory, translation studies considered three key roles in the translation process: the source text author, the translator, and the target text reader.⁶¹ The translation process was considered linear, with the translator moving from reading the source text to producing the target text. However, with the introduction of the Skopos Theory, a fourth actor, the “commissioner,” is involved, and the process becomes non-linear. Reiss and Vermeer (1984) defined the *skopos* as determined by a “commissioner” or “initiator,” who often serves as the sponsor of a translation project; sometimes the translators themselves may define it. Regardless, the *skopos* is defined based on the perceived needs of the target audience. This emphasizes the importance of translation purpose and function.⁶²

Nord argues that translation necessitates not only linguistic expertise but also a cultural theory emphasizing the communicative function of languages involved.⁶³ She considers culture as indispensable for understanding and analyzing translation processes. She challenges the notion that functionalism is incompatible with literary texts, viewing it instead as a form of communication influenced by situational factors.⁶⁴ Therefore, Nord adopts a top-down approach that seeks equivalence at the pragmatic textual level, while acknowledging the importance of addressing lexical and semantic discrepancies between source and target texts.

Basic Terminologies

Various technical terms are used by functionalist writers, necessitating brief explanations, although not all are widely used or necessary in Bible translation.

1. **Commissioner or initiator:** This refers to the individual or organization requesting the translation.⁶⁵ In some cases, the translator may act as their own commissioner.
2. **Translation assignment, commission, or brief:** According to Nord the term “translation assignment” comprises formal instructions for translators, often specified by clients or initiators.⁶⁶ These instructions detail the purpose, audience, timing, and function of the intended communication. While typically employed in professional translation settings, such as corporate environments, commissions can vary widely in complexity, ranging from comprehensive briefs to concise directives.⁶⁷ suggests that clients should ideally provide detailed information about the purpose, audience, timing, location, occasion, and medium of communication, along with the desired function of the text, to create a clear translation brief. In the context of Bible translation, where professional translators may not always be involved, translators, readers, and publishers often define their own tasks based on the Skopos theory principle.⁶⁸ This theory allows for a flexible approach, emphasizing purposeful translation actions, whether undertaken independently or assigned by others.
4. **Expert:** This term refers to the translator. Referring to the translator as an “expert” underlines the translator’s experience and capability in transcultural communication. Usually, the translator is skilled in both source and target culture communication remains relevant.
5. **Translatum or translat:** These terms are equivalent to “the target text.” The necessity for these terms is unclear, as their usage is not consistent with the proponents of the Skopos theory.

⁶⁰ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 27-29.

⁶¹ Hafida, “Functionalist Approaches,” 31.

⁶² Hafida, “Functionalist Approaches,” 32.

⁶³ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 111.

⁶⁴ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 1-2.

⁶⁵ Nord, *Text analysis in translation*, 4.

⁶⁶ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 30.

⁶⁷ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 30.

⁶⁸ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 6.

6. **Translatorial action:** This term, synonymous with “translating,” originates from the perception of translation as a form of action theory.
7. **Consumer:** Functionalists use this term to refer to the target reader or the receptor community.
8. **Adequacy:** This refers to the qualities of a target text in relation to the translation brief as viewed by the readers (or consumers) of the text, emphasizing that the translated text must meet the requirements specified.⁶⁹

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The Skopos theory is guided by three core principles: the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. The Skopos rule emphasizes that translation should prioritise fulfilling the purpose or intention of the translation, known as “the end justifies the means”.⁷⁰ This means that how translation activity is conducted is determined by the intended function or Skopos of the target text rather than the original text. This principle clarifies what constitutes a successful translation, with the approach varying based on the required purpose or type of translation.

The “coherence rule” refers to the logical consistency and clarity of the target text.⁷¹ This rule highlights the necessity of ensuring that the translated text is coherent and understandable to the target audience.⁷² It requires the translation to maintain intratextual coherence; meaning, the text should be comprehensible and meaningful to recipients within the target culture.⁷³ To achieve this, translators must consider cultural and linguistic disparities between the source and target languages.

The third is the “fidelity rule” or “intertextual coherence.” This rule underscores the significance of preserving faithfulness to the source text.⁷⁴ Here, translations are regarded as vehicles for conveying information and are thus expected to maintain a certain level of connection with the original text. The required relationship may relate to content, form, or effect. However, fidelity does not strictly entail word-for-word translation. The objective is to faithfully convey the source text’s meaning, style, and tone into the target language while addressing the needs of the target audience and the purpose of the translation task.

These rules are hierarchically ordered based on their significance— intertextual coherence is subordinate to intratextual coherence, which is also subordinate to the Skopos rule. Therefore, the primary goal of the translator is to understand the purpose of a specific translation task rather than adhering strictly to the fidelity of the source text. This departure from traditional translation theories underscores the flexibility and adaptability of the Skopos theory in catering to the diverse communicative needs of target audiences.

In addition to the three rules, Nord introduces a fourth principle, “Function plus Loyalty,” which emphasizes the translator’s duty to align the translation’s purpose with the intentions of the original author. Loyalty extends to all parties involved in the translation process, including the author, initiator, and receiver.⁷⁵ Loyalty is an ethical concept in that it requires translators must exhibit moral accountability to their counterparts during a communication exchange by adhering to ethical standards in translation.⁷⁶ Nord contends that loyalty is vital in Bible translation to prevent translators from pursuing goals that the original writers would have considered immoral or unethical.⁷⁷ This notion has garnered approval from Bible translators employing a functional

⁶⁹ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 35.

⁷⁰ Vermeer, “Scopos and Commission in Translational Action,” 101.

⁷¹ Wang Zheng, “Introduction of Functionalism and Functional Translation Theory,” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* volume 185, (2018): 623-627, 624.

⁷² Vermeer, “Scopos and Commission in Translational Action,” 113.

⁷³ Zheng, “Introduction of Functionalism,” 625.

⁷⁴ Vermeer, “Scopos and Commission in Translational Action,” 229.

⁷⁵ Christine Nord, “ Manipulation and Loyalty in Functional Translation,” *Translation and Power, Special Issue of Current Writing* 14(2), (2002): 32-44, 36.

⁷⁶ Cheung, “Functionalism and Foreignisation,” 147.

⁷⁷ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 185-200.

approach.⁷⁸ Nord points out that, should the client request a translation that compromises the loyalty either to the author, the target readership, or both, the translator ought to engage in discussion on this matter with the client, and if necessary, the translator should consider declining the translation task. Thus, Nord introduces the concept of “loyalty” to temper the perceived freedom granted to translators by functionalists.⁷⁹ She builds upon Vermeer’s framework to address its limitations by incorporating the concept of loyalty.

The concept of loyalty differs from fidelity or faithfulness, focusing instead on the interpersonal relationships within translation. Nord explains that translator loyalty entails commitments to both the source and target sides; this makes it different from fidelity or faithfulness, which usually concern the relationship between source and target texts.⁸⁰ Loyalty is a social responsibility between individuals. Function relates to ensuring the target text functions effectively in its intended context, while loyalty pertains to the translator's commitment to all parties involved.⁸¹ Therefore, while fidelity focuses on linguistic coherence, loyalty pertains to the moral relationship between participants in a communication process. To be loyal the translator has to consider the conventions of a particular translation situation.⁸² However, these conventions are not to be ranked higher than translation norms. Nord advocates for translators to respect the source text producer and adjust the target text's purpose to align with the source text writer's intentions. The combination of function and loyalty enhances the Skopos Theory, grants translators some flexibility in the translation process and ensures that the brief is satisfied and the translation is accepted by the receptor community.⁸³ The next section focuses on various functions inherent in a text.

Forms of functions of the text

As previously discussed, the Skopos theory emphasizes the functional aspect of translation. This entails the translator initially identifying the purpose of the source text and ensuring that this purpose is preserved in the target text. Nord elaborates that the function of a text is not inherent but rather determined pragmatically by the recipient in a specific context, considering various factors such as participants, medium, time, place, and occasion.⁸⁴ The recipient also evaluates linguistic, stylistic, semantic, or non-verbal cues reflecting the sender's intentions. Consequently, the recipient forms expectations regarding the text's function based on these situational cues and seeks confirmation or adjustment by analyzing the text itself.⁸⁵

The various text functions are referential function, expressive function, appellative function, and phatic function. Except for the phatic function, texts are typically multifunctional; however, one function may often be more prominent than the others. The translator must ensure that the factual information and clarity of the original text are accurately conveyed in the translation. The referential function relates to the context and describes (or refers to) situations, phenomena, objects, or mental states.⁸⁶ It can be analyzed based on the nature of the object or referent involved. If the referent is an unfamiliar fact or situation to the receiver (e.g., a recent political event or a new product), the text function may involve reporting or describing. If the referent is language itself or a particular language usage, the text function may be metalinguistic. This function depends on the reader's ability to understand the text, which can present translation challenges if the source and target audiences do not share the same background knowledge about the subjects mentioned. It deals with elements whose true value may be questioned, particularly when the truth value is the same in both the real

⁷⁸ Aloo O. Mojola, and Ernst R. Wendland, *Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies In Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* edited by T. Wilt (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2003), 16-17.

⁷⁹ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 119, 200.

⁸⁰ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 125.

⁸¹ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 126.

⁸² Naude, “Translation Studeis,” 14.

⁸³ Naude, “Translation Studeis,” 14.

⁸⁴ Nord, “Functional Translation Units,” 43.

⁸⁵ Nord, “Functional Translation Units,” 43.

⁸⁶ Nord, “Translating as a Purposeful Activity: A Prospective Approach,” *TEFLIN Journal* 17(2), (2006): 131-143, 136.

and assumed worlds.⁸⁷ The referential function of a text answers questions like: Which object is being talked about? It depends on a proper balance between the information explicitly stated in the text and the information that is omitted because the reader is expected to already know it.⁸⁸ A skilled writer avoids providing too much explicit information that the reader already knows, as this can make the text dull and uninteresting. Conversely, if readers cannot relate the text to their existing knowledge, it becomes difficult to understand. This need for balance, as highlighted by Nord, is crucial. An example of a referential text is Paul's description of himself as a servant and apostle of Christ in Romans 1:1, where readers are expected to understand who Paul is within their context.⁸⁹

The expressive function of communication pertains to how the speaker or writer conveys their emotional state and subjective attitude toward particular objects and phenomena.⁹⁰ This expression can be manifested through various linguistic elements, such as interjections like “ah!” (indicating surprise, delight, or fright) and “Hmm!” (indicating dismay, sadness, or pain).⁹¹ Being sender-oriented, the expressive function can present translation challenges, especially if emotions are subtly implied or if there are significant cultural differences between the source and target audiences. Two biblical examples throw further light on these functions. The first example is found in David's cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). This expression conveys David's deep distress, anguish, and feeling of abandonment. Another example is “You foolish Galatians!” (Gal. 3:1) which expresses Paul's frustration and disappointment at members of the Galatian church. Both examples show how biblical authors use expressive functions to express their inner feelings and attitudes.

The appellative function engages the readers' experiences, emotions, knowledge, and sensitivities to elicit a response.⁹² In everyday life, texts with an appellative function, like advertisements, political speeches, or persuasive essays, aim to influence or persuade the audience. The appellative function uses words for illustration, persuasion, commands, exhortations, and advertisements to engage readers.⁹³ This function relies heavily on the receiver of the message. An example is found in Matthew 5:14-15, where Jesus appeals to the experiences of the disciples to illustrate that their Christian lives should set a “shining” example to others. He does so by employing the metaphor of a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. Another example is in James 2:15-16, where James uses a persuasive appeal to highlight the importance of faith accompanied by action. This passage emphasizes the importance of not merely offering well wishes to someone in need, but also providing practical assistance. Simply offering words of comfort without meeting the person's tangible needs is ineffective and lacks genuine care and compassion. This appeals to the reader's sense of responsibility and compassion and encourages them to act on their faith by helping those in need. Both examples show how the appellative function seeks to prompt a specific reaction or behavior from the audience. The translator's task is to ensure that the translated text effectively provokes the desired reaction or behavior from the target audience, maintaining the persuasive power of the original.

The phatic function deals with maintaining communication and social relationships.⁹⁴ It serves to initiate and conclude communication between sender and receiver, ensuring the channel remains open for as long as desired.⁹⁵ It also shapes the social relationship between them. This function depends on the conventional use of linguistic, non-linguistic, and paralinguistic elements in specific situations, like casual conversations about the weather or the customary proverbs used to

⁸⁷ Nord, “Translating as a Purposeful Activity,” 136.

⁸⁸ Nord, “Function + Loyalty: Theology Meets Skopos,” *Open Theology* 2, (2016):566–580, 574.

⁸⁹ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 100.

⁹⁰ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 100.

⁹¹ Nord, “Translating as a Purposeful Activity,” 137.

⁹² Nord, “Translating as a Purposeful Activity,” 138.

⁹³ Nord, “Translating as a Purposeful Activity,” 138.

⁹⁴ Nord, “Function + Loyalty,” 48.

⁹⁵ Nord, “Translating as a Purposeful Activity,” 135.

start (German) tourist information texts.⁹⁶ It includes texts that focus on the interaction itself, such as greetings, small talk, or conversational fillers. According to Jakobson, the phatic function primarily serves to initiate, sustain, or terminate communication and to ensure the engagement of the interlocutor.⁹⁷ It involves various aspects, including making initial contact through greetings or small talk. It maintains communication through meta-discourse or topic progression, closing interactions with summaries or farewells, and establishing social roles through forms of address or register choices.⁹⁸ Expressions such as “Hello do you hear me?” and “Are you there?” are meant for phatic purposes.

Paul’s introductory statements in his letters primarily serve phatic functions, aiming to establish social connections. Examples include greetings such as “From Paul, an apostle...” (Gal. 1:1-2) and “From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy...” (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; see also 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Rom. 1:1, 7; Col. 1:1-2). Translating such phatic texts requires preserving social and cultural nuances to facilitate smooth communication and maintain social connections.

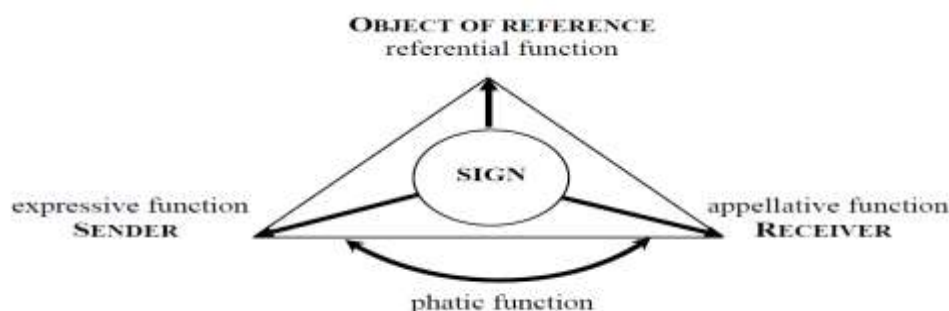


Fig 1: Diagram showing the different functions.⁹⁹

The Looping Nature of Translation

A crucial aspect of Nord’s model (1991) is its looping nature—at each step, the translator must “look back” at the findings from the source text analysis and their implications for the target text.¹⁰⁰ This continuous back-and-forth process helps ensure that no important factors are overlooked and the most appropriate solutions are chosen. This iterative approach is depicted in the looping model of the translation process shown in Figure 2.

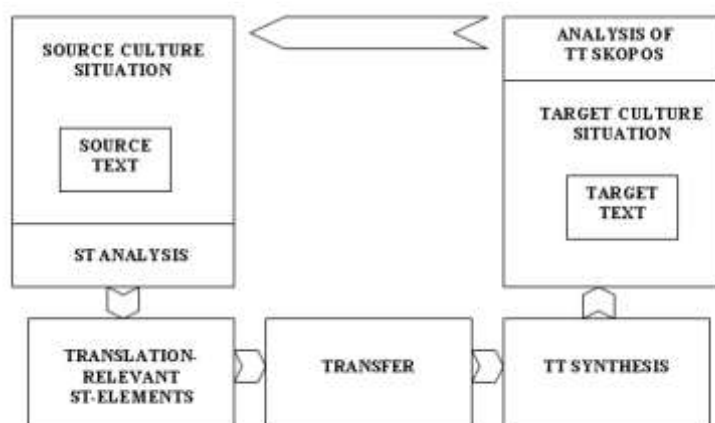


Figure 2: Looping Model of the Translation Process.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Nord, “Translating as a Purposeful Activity,” 135.

⁹⁷ Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings: Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, Edited by Stephen Rudy. (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 24.

⁹⁸ Nord, “Function + Loyalty,” 572.

⁹⁹ Nord, “Function + Loyalty,” 135

¹⁰⁰ Nord, *Text analysis in translation*, 35

¹⁰¹ Nord, *Text analysis in translation*, 34.

The diagram shows the looping model, divided into three steps: (i) target text (TT) skopos analysis, (ii) source text analysis to check compatibility and focus on key elements for TT production, and (iii) structuring the target text. The translator thus oscillates between the TT and the source text (ST), forming a continuous loop. The “looping model” emphasizes that translation is not a straightforward or linear journey from a starting point (ST) to a destination (TT). Rather, it is a circular and recursive process that involves numerous feedback loops, with translation activities continually looping back on themselves.

According to Nord, when the translator creates a functional text that meets the needs of the initiator, the target text will align with the TT skopos.¹⁰² This view aligns with Pym’s idea of risk management in the second part of the translation process. Anthony Pym suggests that not all elements of the source text need the same level of attention and precision.¹⁰³ Some elements pose higher risks, while others are low risk. Therefore, translators should focus more on addressing the high-risk elements diligently, while not overly prioritizing the low-risk ones.¹⁰⁴

Comparison between the functionalist approach and linguistic-based approaches

This section outlines key dissimilarities between the functionalist (skopos) and linguistic approaches to translation. Firstly, the Skopos theory emphasizes the purpose or function of the translation, guiding translators to prioritise the communicative needs of the target audience, whereas equivalence theories focus on achieving similarity or correspondence between the source and target texts, often prioritizing fidelity to the content and style of the source text.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, since the translator’s authority stems from the intended function of the translation, the functional theory allows for flexibility in translation strategies and approaches, but in equivalence theories, the source text holds primary authority, and hinders flexibility in translation strategies and approaches. Thirdly, the success of a translation in the Skopos theory is evaluated based on how effectively it fulfills its intended function in the target culture, whereas, in equivalence theories, translations are assessed based on their degree of equivalence to the source text, considering factors such as semantic accuracy, stylistic consistency, and textual fidelity. Fourthly, contrary to traditional approaches where the source text dictates the translation process, the Skopos theory emphasizes the prospective function or purpose of the target text. This rule addresses the fundamental question of what translation adequately meets the skopos. This may vary from a free interpretation to a faithful rendition depending on the specific purpose or typology of the translation task.

Applying the functionalist model to translation management

Managing a Bible translation project is not an easy task. From planning to the execution of the project, there is a need to put in place measures that will make the translation what it is intended for. In this section, the paper considers ways in which the Skopos theory significantly informs and impacts translation management through its structured, purpose-driven framework.

Firstly, it emphasizes that the purpose (skopos) of the translation should guide all decisions. This aspect is crucial within the translation brief, as it precisely outlines the translation’s skopos, thereby directing the translator in choosing the suitable method or strategy to accomplish the intended purpose.¹⁰⁶ Functionalist ideas emphasise the crucial role of the commissioner in shaping the translation according to their expectations and needs.¹⁰⁷ Hence, the translation brief will incorporate input from the commissioner, client, and reader, in order to ensure that decisions reflect the collective preferences of the key stakeholders involved. Translation managers use this principle

¹⁰² Nord, . *Text analysis in translation*, 33.

¹⁰³ Anthony Pym, “Text and Risk in Translation,” In Maria Sidiropoulou and Anastasia Papaconstantinou (eds). *Choice and Difference in Translation. The Specifics of Transfer* pp. 27-42 (Athens: University of Athens, 2004), 2.

¹⁰⁴ Pym, “Text and Risk in Translation,” 2.

¹⁰⁵ Wang, “Introduction of Functionalism,” 624.

¹⁰⁶ Nord, “Functional Translation Units,” 43.

¹⁰⁷ Silvia Parra-Galiano, “La revisión de traducciones en la traductología” (Thesis, University of Granada, 2005) 67. Retrieved from <http://hera.ugr.es/tesisugr/15472905.pdf>,

to ensure that the translation meets the specific needs and goals of the commissioner (whether those are informative, persuasive, or for another purpose). This focus on purpose ensures that translations are not just linguistically accurate but also functionally effective and relevant.

Secondly, the Skopos theory prioritizes a client-centric approach. Therefore, as the team of translators go about their duties, they are expected to ensure that the needs of the commissioner or the receptor community are met. The theory influences the selection of appropriate translation strategies. Guided by the skopos, translation managers can choose methods that align with the intended purpose. This might involve deciding between a more literal translation or a more adaptive approach, depending on what will best serve the translation's function. The translation manager, aware of this, needs to recruit and train the translators to work in accordance with the needs of the receptor community. Translation managers, therefore, must understand and incorporate the client's expectations into the translation process.

Thirdly, the skopos theory informs quality assurance processes by defining quality in terms of functional adequacy. Instead of applying a one-size-fits-all standard, quality is assessed based on how well the translation fulfills its intended purpose. This approach leads to more relevant and client-specific quality checks, ensuring that the translation is not only accurate but also appropriate for its intended use.

CONCLUSION

From the conceptual analysis made so far in the paper, it can be concluded that the academic field of Translation studies is relatively new, though translation activities have existed for many centuries. Translation is a complex activity that defies a single definition or theory. As such various theories have been propounded as suitable for Translation studies with each contributing something vital and meaningful to the translation process and analysis of the product of this process. The functional translation theory (which was the focus of this paper) arose due to the inadequacy of traditional theories in translating pragmatic texts like technical instructions, long overlooked by literary translation scholars. Functionalism in translation promises to advance translation practice academically by prioritizing the purpose and function of texts over the text itself or the translator's preferences. This purpose-driven approach is central to functionalist theory, which includes approaches like the Skopos theory, Nida's functional equivalence, and text typology. This approach ensures the involvement of all major stakeholders in key decision-making processes. As such, if properly implemented, the Skopos theory has the tendency to make translations more acceptable and engaging. Therefore, it provides a better alternative for managing translation activities. While this paper provides only a glimpse into the vast realm of functional translation strategies, it serves to encourage readers to explore further to discover more translation strategies and approaches.

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