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“For She Loved Much”
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At Home in All Languages and Cultures
Bible Translation and World Christianity in the Twenty-First Century
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Editor’s Foreword

While SIL has a demonstrated specialty in sacred text translation, this issue of *Journal of Translation* features an article on translation matters related to the modern-day agricultural sphere in east Africa. The article we present on agropesticide terms rendered in Kiswahili from English is by two authors (Matalu and Sebonde) from the University of Dodoma in Tanzania. We hope that with its publication, this information will be shared widely and be of use to farmers and product decision-makers in this key domain of life and subsistence.

Additionally, this issue offers articles on reason clauses in Greek (Kroeger), theological influence on translation (Liu), the challenge of what is called “theological decolonization” in matters related to translation training (Hemphill), a fascinating look at honorifics in Japanese (Doi), and a major article on the intersection of Bible translation and World Christianity, authored by SIL’s executive director, Michel Kenmogne.

We the editors anticipate that you will be encouraged and challenged, and your knowledge broadened, by the contents. We welcome your comments, as always, at editor_JOT@sil.org. And also, we welcome your inquiries about submissions. Please share your research on translation theory and practice!

One way to do that is to consider a contribution to our upcoming October 2022 special issue on the translation of conditional constructions in sacred texts. We invite papers on the following topics:

- language overviews: brief descriptions of how conditional meanings are expressed in a given language, with examples of how this has affected translation;
- exegetical summaries: exegesis of passages that contain conditionals, in particular where the intended meaning is debated;
- discussion of specific conditional constructions in Biblical Hebrew or Greek.

For more information on submissions, and background to the topic, we invite you to our “Call for Contributions” page on JOT: https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/jot/call-for-papers-conditionals-2022.

Freddy Boswell
Linguistic Gaps in the English-Kiswahili Translation of Agropesticide Texts in Tanzania

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Abstract: This paper investigates the linguistic gaps in the English-Kiswahili translation of agropesticide texts in Tanzania. The Kiswahili translation of such information enables farmers to be familiar with the proper ways of controlling and managing pests and diseases. Different agropesticide texts were collected from farm input shops and analysed, and informants were interviewed based on the words, phrases, and sentences from the texts. The data were then analysed through thematic analysis. The translation of such information faces some challenges including coinage in the source language, meaning distinction in the source language, formal differences between English and Kiswahili, lack of Kiswahili equivalents for the names of some Kiswahili diseases and pests, and the traditional agricultural practices. Given the genealogical and typological differences between English and Kiswahili, translating through descriptions would overcome non-equivalence between the two languages at the word level. Translating agropesticide texts in Tanzania has implications for proper farming practices among farmers. Directions on the proper use of agropesticides are meant to make farmers practice productive farming. The challenges facing the translation between the two languages can be mitigated through descriptive equivalence and borrowing which is adapted to the morphological and phonological patterns of the target language.

Keywords: translation, equivalence, non-equivalence, source language, target language, agropesticide
1 Introduction

In most developing countries, including Tanzania, the sharing of agricultural information between farmers and agricultural experts is dependent on conventional ways. To a large extent, these ways include people (such as agricultural extension officers and farm input vendors), texts (such as leaflets, magazines, and newspapers), and public campaigns (Abdullahi et al. 2016). In Tanzania, agricultural extension officers, veterinary officers, and farm input vendors play a big role in familiarizing farmers with better farming practices.

Given that in Tanzania many agricultural inputs such as pesticides, fertilizers, machinery, and chemicals are imported from foreign countries, the description for their proper use is in the English language. If translation is not done, farmers cannot understand the descriptions in the instructional manuals of the farm input, since most of them are not familiar with English. Thus, knowledge of farming practices will not be shared, and communication of agricultural information will break down. In the globalized world where the flow of commodities from one country to another is common, communication through the target language knowledge is important for such transactions to be successful (Imre 2012:1053).

1.1 The translation of agricultural information

One of the challenges that faces farmers in the modern world is access to agricultural information in local languages (IFLA and TASCHA 2017:60). Agricultural information is available mostly in widespread languages such as English, Spanish, and French, which are not familiar to most rural farmers in different parts of the world, including Africa and Asia.

Some initiatives have been taken by different governmental, non-governmental, and international agencies to make sure that such information is available to farmers in the local languages. For example, AccessAgriculture, an international non-governmental organization (NGO), disseminates agricultural knowledge to farmers worldwide through videos translated into respective local languages in East Africa, including Kiswahili, Ateso, Luganda, and Luo, among others (Bentley 2016:4 and Karubanga et al. 2017:192). Another international NGO known as PANOS has a database of radio programme materials for agricultural extension on cassettes and the internet that are translated into local languages (Chapman et al. 2003:6).

Further, some scholars including Yared (2014:84) and Karubanga et al. (2017:192) maintain that there is still a need to translate agricultural information from foreign languages into local languages so that farmers can comprehend it easily. That is to say, understanding agricultural information in the local
language and context is important for better farming practices and products. In Tanzania, information regarding the proper use of agro-chemicals and machinery is translated from English into Kiswahili for farmers to comprehend.

1.2 The challenges in translating agricultural information

Translation of a text involving any kind of information and any languages is always surrounded by challenges. The inadequacy of translation stems from irreducible linguistic and cultural differences between the languages, contexts, and cultures of the source and target groups (Glodjović 2010:143). No matter how different are the languages, cultures, and life conventions of the source and the target groups, the cost of translation failures is always borne by the target group.

In translating agricultural information, challenges have been reported. Bentley (2016:10) in the Luo translations in Uganda reports dialect differences within the same language as among these challenges. When translating into languages that have different dialects, the translator is likely to favour equivalents from one dialect over the others, thereby inhibiting proper comprehension of messages by the speakers of the disadvantaged dialects. For example, Bentley (2016:10) found some words from the Langi dialect being used for the Acholi Luo dialect speakers. When a word or expression is used by speakers of a different dialect, it is used out of context and culture; thus, it may fail to capture adequately some realities as intended in the target readership.

In Tanzania, standard Kiswahili which is familiar to a majority of the population was chosen from the Kiunguja dialect among other dialects such as Kimrima (Kimtang’ata), Kipemba, and Kimgao (Petzell 2012:138). The speakers of these dialects understand each other. The dialect differences among the speakers of Kiswahili are manifested in speech, not in writing. Then, the translation of agropesticide information into Kiswahili will have no significant dialectical impact to the readership as it does in other languages, as discussed in the preceding paragraph.

Karubanga et al. (2017:192) in Uganda report that the Runyankore-Rukinga, Rufumbira-Runyarwanda, Luganda, and Lukongo translated versions of videos for farmers had some challenges, including the use of technical language that affects the comprehension of the message by the farmers and information loss in the target language compared with the source language (2017:192, 196). When some facets of information are lost, farmers receive less information, something that is likely to inhibit proper comprehension of the intended message and can, in turn, affect the real practice of what is intended. The technicality of the language used is likely to exclude many farmers from understanding the intended message, thereby affecting the intended practice.
Lack of equivalents in the target language, especially for culturally specific words, is another challenge in translation. Though it is without a doubt acknowledged that anything is translatable, some cultural peculiarities remain untranslatable. For example, Xiong (2014:2155) says that there are no English equivalents for some Chinese peculiar words such as food names, religious terms, names of cultural relics, and new terms with Chinese characteristics. In Kiswahili, Malangwa (2010:124) reports that the computer term window has no ready equivalent in Kiswahili, and Jilala (2014:152) reports that the Kiswahili term ugali has no lexicalized English term. In these cases, borrowing from the source language is used to “translate” such words. Translation through borrowing has always resulted in producing other messages than what the target audience really wants, and sometimes the translation may deviate from the canonical patterns of the target language.

Another problem that has been reported is meaning distinction between the source and the target language, especially for culture specific terms. Languages express cultural realities differently. One language may use only a single word to refer to a certain concept, artefact, practice, or experience, but another may express the same distinctively by using different terms. With reference to food and crop names, Malangwa (2010:109–110) shows that some Kiswahili food names have the same English equivalents although they denote different senses in the local context. For example, the Kiswahili words wali, bokoboko, biriani, and mchele are translated as ‘rice’ in English. That is to say, English is unable to make distinctions between kinds of rice while Kiswahili can do so. Kiswahili also makes a distinction between mpunga (unhusked rice cereals and as a rice plant) and mchele (husked rice) while English refers to such distinctions by a single word ‘rice.’ These distinctions, if not properly translated, may give misleading information to the readership and in turn affect the intended practice.

2 The Functional Equivalence Theory

The functional equivalence theory was proposed by Nida (1964:159). This theory propagates that the message in the translated text should be approximately equal to the message in the source language. The theory proposes for the closest natural equivalent to the source language, entailing that ‘equivalent’ refers to the source language message, ‘naturalness’ to the target language, and ‘closest’ to the degree of resemblance between the messages in the source and target languages (Nida 1964:166).

No matter how different the two languages involved in translation are structurally, morphologically, or lexically, the message in the target language should be as close as possible to that in the source language. That is, the message should be prioritized over the form (Li 2006:72).
Since English and Kiswahili are two languages which are both typologically and genealogically different, their forms are quite different, making the task of translating even harder. This theory, then, advocates that such formal differences be disregarded at the expense of message in translating. In contrast, efforts to ensure formal correspondence with these two distinct languages will always end in a great loss. This theory is considered appropriate in this context because it allows translators to be flexible in handling problems of specific situations (Zhang 2010:882), such as the linguistic and cultural uniqueness that surround English and Kiswahili. This theory, then, helps to examine the extent to which the English-Kiswahili translated information suits the target language receptors and their cultural orientation. Thus, this paper examines the challenges facing English-Kiswahili translation of agropesticide information in Tanzania.

3 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach uses data that are in the form of texts (Dawson 2002:133). The present study considered textual data from the agropesticide texts, collected by the researchers from farm input shops. Fifteen cotton farmers, five agricultural extension officers, six translators, and five farm input vendors were included in the study. Farmers and translators were selected through snowball sampling technique, the agricultural extension officers through purposive sampling, and the farm input vendors through convenience sampling. The data from the said informants were gathered through interview in Bariadi District, Tanzania. The interviews were conducted separately in different settings for each category of informants. The Kiswahili translated words, phrases, and sentences were selected by the researcher from the user guide manuals of agropesticides for reference in interviews with the informants.

The interviews with the farmers at their homes were meant to reveal their opinions regarding their satisfaction with the Kiswahili translated texts and their ability to comprehend the proper application of different agropesticides through those texts. Each agricultural extension officer was interviewed in their offices to get their comments regarding farmers’ ability to comprehend the proper application of farm inputs through translation without assistance from them. The farm input sellers were interviewed in their shops to seek information regarding whether or not farmers seek clarification from them on the proper use of agropesticides after purchasing. The translators were interviewed in their convenient places to reveal the challenges that they face when translating such texts. The data from interviews were analysed thematically following flexibly the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps include familiarizing with
the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, revising themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Themes that emerged from each interview were compared with those from other interviews, revised, defined, and then named. The common themes that emerged from interviews which were considered as a shared understanding of the participants regarding the matter under investigation included coinage and meaning distinction in the source language, formal differences between English and Kiswahili, lack of some Kiswahili equivalents, and Tanzanian traditional farming practices. These themes were selected because they were frequently mentioned by the study participants.

4 Findings and discussion
The following are the themes that emerged as the challenges in the English-Kiswahili translation of agropesticide texts.

4.1 Coinages in the source language

Coinages are invented terms to express new concepts. There are coinages in the agricultural field that are introduced to express product names and new concepts. The coinages in the source language have no equivalents in the target language because they are first lexicalized in the source language before they are in the target language. Thus, they have no already lexicalized equivalents in the target language. Some would even need no lexicalization in the target language. For example, the source language brand names of pesticides such as *Twigathoate 40 EC*, *Mo-durs 48 EC*, *Volar Mz 690 WP*, *Snowcron 50% TIKTIK*, *TIXFIX*, *Skazon Powder*, *Paranex ® 100 EC*, and *BAMIC 2.0 EC* need to be used as loan words in the target language since hardly can there be equivalents for them in the receiving language. Through borrowing, such terms enter the host language with their affinity with the source language. They always tend to deviate from the morphological and phonological conventions of the target language. Since they are strange and odd in the target language, they do not satisfy linguistic and cultural needs of the target language receptors (Jilala 2014:153). Farmers cannot pronounce, memorize, and internalize the transferred product names in their daily farming transactions. They cannot identify them by name if they want to buy a new one even if they had bought and used the same before. They memorize them by the colour of the container or pictures on the user guide manual/label.

In Kenya, the same situation has been reported that farmers required to be shown the farm inputs first before purchasing them because of difficulty in pronouncing and memorizing their names. In Kiswahili, such names could be better understood by the rural Tanzanian farmers if they were adapted to its
graphemic and morpho-phonological patterns instead of being transferred (as proposed by functional equivalence theory). Thus, the word Modurs could be spelled as Modaz; Paranex as Paraneksi, and Bamic as Bamiki, so that they are written in the same way as they are pronounced, unlike in English where the way a word is spelled is not necessarily the same as it is pronounced. In doing so, they would retain their names but in the taste of the consumers and this would not significantly affect their trade names.

4.2 Meaning distinctions in the source language

One language may be capable of setting meaning distinctions of the same concept depending on the cultural orientations of its speakers. Such distinctions may not exist in the target language. In English, the word pesticide is a superordinate for all chemicals that may be used to kill fungus, bacteria, weeds, and insects, to mention a few. Its hyponyms include insecticide, herbicide, fungicide, and acaricide.

Kiswahili does not make a distinction between pesticide and insecticide. Through derivation with such words as bases and -cide as a suffix, we get insecticide and pesticide. Again, pesticide is not necessarily insecticide. However, in Kiswahili, pesticide and insecticide seem to respond equally into dawa ya kuulia wadudu (chemicals that kill insects/pests) in many English-Kiswahili translated agropesticide texts. That is, they seem to have no difference in Kiswahili. As Baker (1992:22) argues, translators will always face a challenge in selecting the suitable equivalent for each meaning distinction in a language that does not make such distinctions.

Since Kiswahili lacks the hyponyms for the English superordinates, replacing specific English words such as insecticide with Kiswahili general phrases such as dawa ya kuulia wadudu, as it is in many texts, is the best option. The functional equivalence theory advocates for semantically tailoring the source language message to the needs and understanding of the target group. Then, using a general term as an equivalent of the specific one is a good option since the prime goal in translation is not to translate words but meanings.

4.3 Formal differences between English and Kiswahili

Each language has its own distinctive formal features that are used to express certain types of meanings. The corresponding formal features may not exist in the target language. For example, the suffix -cide in English which means ‘killer’ can be used to derive consistently the names of chemicals that are used to kill certain vectors or plants as in pesticide (that which kills pests), insecticide (that which kills insects), fungicide (that which kills fungi), and acaricide (that which
4.3 Linguistic Gaps in the English-Kiswahili Translation of Agropesticide Texts

Kiswahili does not have corresponding formal features to host adequately those in English. Rather, it uses words and sentences instead of morphemes as in English. For example, *pesticide* in many texts is translated as *dawa* (which can roughly be translated as ‘chemicals’) and *dawa ya kuulia wadudu* (which can roughly be translated as ‘the chemicals that kill insects’). The phrase *dawa ya kuulia wadudu* serves as an equivalent to pesticide, insecticide, and acaricide.

In the reviewed texts, the equivalents for the words derived from the suffix *-osis* are inconsistent and do not even reflect the message of the source text. For example, in the reviewed texts, the Kiswahili equivalent for *salmonellosis* is *maradhi mbali mbali* (which can roughly be translated as ‘different diseases’) and *coccidiosis* is *maambukizo mengi* (which can roughly be translated as ‘heavy infections’). The Kiswahili equivalents do not respond adequately to their English counterparts, for *maradhi mbali mbali* does not necessarily mean salmonellosis; it can refer to different diseases other than salmonellosis. Likewise, *maambukizo mengi* does not necessarily refer to coccidiosis; it can refer to different kinds of infections other than those caused by coccidia.

4.4 Lack of Kiswahili equivalents for some crop diseases and pests

Kiswahili lacks already lexicalized names of some crop pests and diseases. The translators just transferred them into Kiswahili. The following are examples of names of crop diseases that lack equivalence in Kiswahili as extracted from one text:

- **English**: “Volar Mz fungicide has both penetrant and contact action against *early blight (caused by Altemari Solani)* and *late blight (caused by phytophthora infestans)* of potatoes and tomatoes when used in protective spray programs.”
  
- **Kiswahili**: “Volar Mz hupenya na huzuia magonjwa ya *early blight (Altermari solani)* na *late blight (phytophthora infestans)* katika viazi na nyanya ikitumiwa kwa njia ya kuzuia magonjwa.”

There are also some names of pests, as found in one text, such as *tuber moth, psylla, plusia looper,* and *Africa bollworm,* that are not translated into Kiswahili. As for the names of diseases, the translators simply transferred them into Kiswahili. Some of the names of pests have their already lexicalized equivalents, although they seem to be unfamiliar to some Kiswahili speakers. For example, Africa bollworm is known as *funza wa vitumba vya pamba* in Kiswahili. The reasons for
borrowing are grounded in the fact that such Kiswahili equivalents have a limited discourse of use, usually in agriculture among agricultural experts. Then, there is likelihood that some translators are unaware of the existence of these Kiswahili terms unless they consult agricultural experts when translating these texts.

As already mentioned by Jilala (2014:153), the transferred words seem odd in the target language and always tend to diffract the flow of the message in the target text, thereby affecting readers’ comprehension. In light of the functional equivalence theory, the names of the diseases and pests whose Kiswahili equivalents are not known would be, at least, adapted to the Kiswahili morphological and phonological patterns. Farmers can pronounce them, making it easier to memorize them even if they do not understand their meanings. Translation product should always achieve something rather than nothing for the readership. Translating terms that the readership can read (even if they do not understand them) is something better than translating terms, which the readership can neither read nor understand, as is the case when borrowing without adapting the loan words to the morphological and phonological norms of the target language.

4.5 The traditional agricultural practices

The modern farming practices expressed in the source texts do not match with the traditional ones in rural areas. Their translations deviate largely from what is actually being practiced in the daily agricultural transactions. For example, in the reviewed texts, the words farrowing houses, poultry houses, dairy parlours, and all farm buildings do not have relevant translations in Kiswahili. These terms are related to zero grazing, which is not common in rural Tanzania. The actual practice is that of herding cattle to different pastures; cattle and poultry are not penned and fed in a particular enclosure.

Shelters for cattle and poultry are sometimes shared with humans. In this case, the meanings of such words as farm buildings and poultry houses are extended to human houses, too, contrary to what it is perceived in the source text. A possible danger is that pesticide meant for animal houses may be applied in a human house that is shared with animals, thereby affecting both pests and humans. Gutt (2010:4) says that translators sometimes forget the socio-cultural orientation of the readership and concentrate much on linguistic factors contrary to the needs of the functional equivalence theory. This situation makes the lay public vulnerable to misinterpretations and misuse of the pesticides.
5 Conclusion and recommendations

Since agriculture is the leading economic sector in Tanzania, translating agropesticide texts has implications for the economy. The directions on the proper use of agropesticides are meant to make farmers practice productive farming. Undoubtedly, if other factors such as weather conditions are favourable, proper application of agropesticides may result in high yield. In contrast, the improper application of agropesticides may result in poor produce. The proper or improper application of agropesticides depends on whether farmers understand the directions properly through translation into their own language. Since English and Kiswahili are genealogically and typologically different, descriptive equivalence is recommended in translation to overcome the non-equivalence that exists between them. Descriptive equivalence renders the source language expressions in terms of descriptions in the target language. Further, the coined lexical items in English, names of diseases and pests that are always rendered through borrowing, should be adapted to the morphological and phonological patterns of Kiswahili.
References


“For She Loved Much”
Reason Clauses in Translation

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Abstract: This article discusses translation issues that arise in dealing with reason clauses of the types introduced in English by the conjunctions *because* and *for*. *Because*, in its subordinating usage, introduces **at-issue** reason clauses, in which both the propositional content of the reason clause and the causal relation itself are part of the main point that is being asserted or questioned. Causal *for* introduces **supplemental** reason clauses, which provide secondary or background-type information. An at-issue reason clause expresses a literal causal relation between two propositions (“real-world causation”), whereas supplemental reason clauses allow a wider range of uses, such as providing evidential/epistemic validation (Mark 14:70 “Surely you are one of them, *for* you too are a Galilean”) and speech act modification (Luke 12:17 “What shall I do, *for* I have nowhere to store my crops”). Moreover, at-issue reason clauses can have ambiguous interpretations when the main clause is negated, questioned, or contains quantifier words like *few* and *many*. This kind of ambiguity does not arise with supplemental reason clauses.

Because of these differences, translating a supplemental reason clause in the SL with an at-issue reason clause in the RL, or vice versa, will affect the information packaging of the verse, since the reason clause is interpreted as being part of the main point of the utterance in one type, but not in the other. This kind of substitution will also add to or restrict the range of possible meanings of the sentence. In some cases, this can introduce ambiguity into the RL that is not present in the SL. In others, it may even remove the correct, intended meaning of the verse as a potential reading of the RL version.
1 Introduction

In Luke 7:47 Jesus says, of the sinful woman who washed his feet with her tears, “Her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much.” When I ask people to paraphrase this verse, most of them (including many who hold seminary degrees) produce a rendition which implies that the woman’s love caused the forgiveness. However, as the UBS *Handbook* points out, in light of the parable of the two debtors (vv. 41–43) this cannot be the intended interpretation. Rather, “The clause refers to the evidence, or proof, of the fact that the woman’s sins had been forgiven....”¹ In other words, Jesus is saying that her great love proves (but does not cause) the reality and magnitude of the forgiveness.

SIL’s *Translator’s Notes* for this passage also focuses at some length on the evidential interpretation of the reason clause. The point needs to be emphasized because the verse is easily misunderstood. It appears that, cross-linguistically, any conjunction which allows the correct, evidential reading for this verse can also express the incorrect, real-world causation reading. And where the real-world causation reading is grammatically possible, and not in conflict with the immediate context, it tends to be preferred as the primary sense of the causal conjunction. For this reason, both the UBS *Handbook* and the *Translator’s Notes* recommend significant restructuring of the passage to clarify the intended meaning, e.g., “the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven” (TEV).

There is some disagreement over whether it is desirable to preserve ambiguity in translation when we are unsure which sense the original author intended. However, in this verse there is no doubt as to which interpretation of the reason clause was intended by the author (and the speaker). Moreover, modern readers seem to be prone to choose the wrong interpretation and the difference is theologically significant. So, there is much to be gained, and little to be lost, by translating the verse unambiguously. But this turns out to be a non-trivial task, not only in English but probably in most languages. It seems that one can achieve this goal only by abandoning the reason clause altogether, as in the TEV rendering.

The reason it is difficult to avoid the unwanted reading here is because it arises not from lexical ambiguity, which tends to be language-specific, but from **pragmatic ambiguity** (Horn 1985; Sweetser 1990), an ambiguity of usage, which tends to apply in similar ways across languages. For this reason, as noted above, any reason clause which can express the desired evidential reading in this context will usually be able to express the unwanted causal interpretation as well.

¹ Reiling and Swellengrebel (1993:324).
In this article, I discuss two basic types of reason clause: subordinate vs. paratactic (section 2). In addition to differences in syntactic structure, the two types differ in the nature of their semantic contribution, and in the range of their semantic functions. Subordinate reason clauses contribute to the “at-issue”, propositional content of the sentence. Paratactic reason clauses contribute secondary or “supplemental” information, and may be loosely described as modifying the utterance rather than the core propositional content of the sentence. In terms of semantic functions, there seems to be a very strong tendency across languages for subordinate reason clauses to express real-world causation, whereas paratactic reason clauses allow a much wider range of uses (Sweetser’s “pragmatic ambiguity”).

Section 3 discusses translation issues that may arise in translating reason clauses. These include dealing with the kind of pragmatic ambiguity illustrated in Luke 7:47 (sec. 3.1); problems that can be introduced if one type of causal conjunction is replaced by the other type (sec. 3.2); and ambiguities that may be present when a subordinate reason clause occurs together with main clause negation, interrogative mood, or certain types of modality (sec. 3.3). Section 4 discusses some additional complicating factors, including other components of meaning that may be attached to certain conjunctions; the fairly common phenomenon of causal conjunctions which are polysemous between the subordinate and paratactic types; and apparent “coercion” effects.

Understanding the differences between these two classes of reason clauses will help the translator to identify and diagnose potential problems, and to decide how best to address these problems.

2 Two types of reason clauses

A brief note by David Cranmer (1984) describes helping a translator for the Themne² language of Sierra Leone decide which conjunctions to use in translating reason clauses, the kind of clauses which are frequently marked in English by the causal conjunctions for and because. Cranmer observes that in English, because is used when the author’s main point is to assert a “direct cause and effect relationship” between the proposition expressed by the reason clause and the proposition expressed by the main clause, whereas for can be used to introduce secondary or supporting information of various kinds.

Adopting the terminology of Wendland (1983), Cranmer refers to the latter type of reason clauses as “digressions”. Wendland describes such digressions as parenthetical comments which temporarily interrupt the temporal or logical flow of the discourse. They are not fully integrated into the syntactic structure

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² David Cranmer, p.c.
or intonation contour of the sentence in which they occur. I will refer to reason clauses of this type as supplements.\textsuperscript{3} Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1350) echo Wendland’s comments on the structure of these constructions. They describe supplements as “elements which occupy a position in linear sequence without being integrated into the syntactic structure of the sentence”, elements which “represent an interruption to the flow of the clause... [T]hey are intonationally separate from the rest of the sentence.”

I will refer to the other type of reason clause, in which the causal relation itself is a central part of the proposition that is being asserted or questioned, as expressing at-issue content.\textsuperscript{4} The distinction between at-issue vs. supplemental reason clauses is defined by the semantic differences between the two types, and this paper will focus primarily on semantic issues. However, cross-linguistically there also seem to be clear syntactic differences between these types of reason clause, and it will be helpful to begin by mentioning these.

2.1 Structural differences

In contrast to supplemental reason clauses, which are not fully integrated into the syntactic structure of the sentence, at-issue reason clauses are (normally) fully integrated into the syntactic structure of the main clause. In other words, at-issue reason clauses are subordinated to the main clause. This subordinate structure may be achieved by means of a causal conjunction (e.g., because), a preposition (e.g., because of), the use of an abstract noun (such as cause or reason) that takes a clausal complement, or (in some languages) by special derivational morphology (e.g., causal nominalization).

As noted above, supplemental reason clauses have the structure of a parenthetical comment. They are not subordinated to the main clause, but normally they are not really coordinated either. They are typically set off from the rest of the sentence by pause and/or intonation break and can be inserted into the middle of another clause, as illustrated for German and English in (1). I will refer to this parenthetical structure as paratactic.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Doch Elymas, der Zauberer (\textit{denn so wird sein Name übersetzt}), leistete ihnen Widerstand und suchte den Statthalter vom Glauben abzuhalten. \textit{“But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed}
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{3} Potts (2005:6); Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1350 ff).

\textsuperscript{4} Potts (2005:6).

\textsuperscript{5} Hoeksema and Napoli (1993); Jivanyan and Samo (2017).
them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.”

A complicating factor in this study is the fact that a single causal conjunction may be polysemous between a subordinating at-issue sense and a paratactic supplemental sense. This issue will be discussed in section 4 below, and at that time we will mention some of the ways in which these two structural patterns can be distinguished. But first, let us consider some of the semantic differences between at-issue vs. supplemental reason clauses.

2.2 Semantic differences

An important aspect of the difference between at-issue vs. supplemental meaning has to do with information packaging. At-issue content is the main point of the current utterance—what is asserted in a statement or queried in a question—whereas supplemental content is not. Supplemental meaning is secondary. It provides supporting content, contextual information, editorial comments, evaluation, etc. It is “used to guide the discourse in a particular direction or to help the hearer to better understand why the at-issue content is important at that stage” (Potts 2005:7).

This primary difference has a number of semantic consequences which can be used as diagnostics to determine whether a causal conjunction in a particular language is of the at-issue type or the supplemental type. We will illustrate some of these diagnostics here by using them to demonstrate that because can, but for cannot, be used to introduce an at-issue reason clause. This shows that causal for is strictly supplemental in nature, whereas because allows an at-issue reading.

a. **Only at-issue content can be the focus (or included in the focus) of a question, that is, the main point being queried:**

   (2) Romans 6:15—What then? Are we to sin because/*for we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

   • Exodus 14:11—“Is it because/*for there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?”

b. **Only at-issue content can be the focus of an answer to a question:**

   (3) Romans 9:32—Why? Because/*for they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works.

   • 2 Corinthians 11:11—So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way... And why? Because/*for I do not love you? God knows I do!

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• **1 John 3:12**—And why did he murder him? *Because*/*for* his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.

c. **Only at-issue content can be interpreted under the scope of clausal negation:**

(4) **Luke 11:8**—I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything *because*/*for* he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

• **John 6:26**—[Y]ou seek me, not *because*/*for* you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

• **John 12:6**—He did not say this *because*/*for* he cared about the poor but because he was a thief.

• **2 Corinthians 7:9**—As it is, I rejoice, not *because*/*for* you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.

• **1 John 2:21**—I write to you, not *because*/*for* you do not know the truth, but because you know it...

• **Deuteronomy 7:7**—It was not *because*/*for* you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you...

Similarly, only at-issue content can be interpreted under the scope of a possibility modal, or as part of the condition in a conditional clause. At-issue content is often referred to as “truth-conditional” meaning, because it forms the basis for deciding whether a speaker’s statement is true or false in a particular situation, and thus can be the basis for challenging the truth of a statement. Supplements are an example of what is sometimes referred to as “use-conditional” meaning.⁷

### 2.3 “Pragmatic ambiguity”

In addition to the semantic contrasts listed in the previous section, there seems to be a strong cross-linguistic tendency for supplemental reason clauses to have a broader range of uses than at-issue reason clauses. Sweetser (1990:76–78)⁸ has identified three common semantic functions which can be expressed by causal conjunctions in a large number of languages: (a) real-world causation, her “content domain” usage, as seen in Matthew 7:25 (“and yet it did not fall, *for* it had been founded on the rock”); (b) the **EVIDENTIAL** (Sweetser’s “epistemic”) function, illustrated in Luke 7:47 (above) or Mark 14:70 (“Surely you are one of them, *for* you too are a Galilean”); and, (c) the **SPEECH ACT** function, in which the reason clause helps to explain the speaker’s reason for performing the speech act

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⁸ See also Sæbø (1991).
contained in the main clause. One such example is seen in Luke 12:17 (“What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?”).

Cross-linguistically, it appears that at-issue reason clauses only express real-world causation. Supplemental reason clauses, in contrast, can typically express any of the three semantic functions identified by Sweetser.9

Sweetser argues that these readings do not arise from lexical polysemy of the conjunction (i.e., three distinct senses). Rather, taking a term from Horn (1985), she describes this situation as a case of PRAGMATIC AMBIGUITY, in other words, an ambiguity of usage rather than an ambiguity of sense. She argues that these conjunctions have a single sense which can operate on three different levels, or domains, of meaning: propositional content, evidential validation, or speech act modification. When the reason clause expresses a real-world cause-and-effect relation, it is part of the propositional content of the utterance. In the evidential reading, the reason clause is used to validate the propositional content by providing the grounds or supporting evidence for the current assertion. A third possibility is to use a reason clause as a speech-act modifier, e.g., to clarify the motivation or intent of the current utterance.

Actually, supplemental causal conjunctions frequently allow more than just the three uses described by Sweetser. For example, they can often be used to provide explanation or clarification even where no causal meaning is involved, as in Acts 13:8: “But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.” A similar example is seen in John 21:7: “When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.” Here the content of the reason clause (“he was stripped for work”) seems to be assumed in the previous clause but has not previously been mentioned in the text. The explanatory parenthetical statement is provided to relieve the reader of the need to “accommodate” this implied information, and to avoid any potential confusion.10

Cranmer cites the “prophetic digression” in Matthew 26:31: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”’” In this verse the reason clause introduced by for does not describe an event or state that causes the disciples to fall away, nor the evidential basis for Jesus’ assertion that they will fall away, nor Jesus’ reason for making this assertion. Rather, it helps

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9 This appears to be the normal case. However, some languages are reported to have supplemental causal conjunctions whose range of uses is more restricted.

10 See Kroeger (2019) for a discussion of presupposition and accommodation in translation.
the addressees make sense of this shocking prediction as a fulfillment of prophecy.

In New Testament passages which involve building an argument, the Greek causal conjunctions *gar* and (to a lesser extent) *hōti* often function as sentence introducers, marking the next step in the argument. In these contexts, the conjunction typically has an evidential or explanatory function, but allows a broad range of semantic connections between the current sentence and the previous sentence. One such passage is found in Romans 1:

(5) Romans 1:14–18 [RSV]:

14I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: 15so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16*For [gar] I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17*For [gar] in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” 18*For [gar] the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth...

2.4 At-issue vs. supplemental causal conjunctions in German

Most reason clauses in German are introduced by one of two conjunctions: *weil* or *denn*. Both words can be used to describe real-world causality, as illustrated in (6). However, as demonstrated by Scheffler (2005, 2013), only *denn* can be used for translating reason clauses in the evidential (7a) and speech act (7b) domains; *weil* would be impossible in these contexts.

(6) a.

Ich hatte Angst vor dir,
1SG had fear before 2SG

*weil* du ein strenger Mann bist.
because 2SG one strict man are

“I was afraid of you because you are a strict man.” (Luke 19:21, GNB)
b. Ich fürchtete mich vor dir,  
1SG feared myself before 2SG

denn du bist ein harter Mann.  
for 2SG are one hard man

“I was afraid of you, for you are a hard man.” (Luke 19:21, Luther 1912)

(7) a. Es hat mich jemand berührt; denn ich habe gespürt,  
it has me someone touched for 1SG have felt

daß eine Kraft von mir ausgegangen ist.  
that one power from 1SG.DAT gone.out is

“Someone touched me, for I feel that power has gone out from me.”  
(Luke 8:46, Luther 1984)

b. Wer ist dieser? denn er gebietet dem Winde und  
who is this for he commands the wind and

dem Wasser, und sie sind ihm gehorsam.  
the water and they are 3SG.M.DAT obedient

“Who is this person? For he commands the wind and the water and  
they are obedient to him.” (Luke 8:25, Luther 1912)

The contrast in usage illustrated in examples (6–7) suggests that weil introduces at-issue reason clauses, whereas denn introduces supplemental reason clauses. This hypothesis is supported by a large body of additional evidence, including examples like those in (8) which show that denn cannot be used when the reason clause is at-issue. Example (8a) involves a reason clause which must be interpreted under the scope of main-clause negation, while in example (8b) the reason clause is the focus of the answer to a ‘why’ question. Both of these are contexts where only an at-issue reason clause is acceptable.

(8) a. John 12:6—  
Er sagte das nicht etwa, weil/*denn er ein Herz für die Armen hatte,  
sondern weil er ein Dieb war. [GNB]

“He didn’t say this because/*for he had a heart for the poor, but  
because he was a thief.”

Luther Bible, © 1984 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Luther 1912 = revision of the Luther Bible, public domain.

13 For additional evidence, see Scheffler (2005, 2013) and references cited there.
b. 1 John 3:12—

Und warum hat er ihn ermordet? Weil/*Denn seine eigenen Taten böse waren, aber das Leben seines Bruders Gott gefiel. [HFA] 

“And why did he murder him? Because/*for his own deeds were evil, but the life of his brother pleased God.”

German is an interesting language in which to investigate these contrasts, because the word order makes it clear which clauses are subordinate and which are not. In subordinate clauses, the tensed verb or auxiliary must appear at the end of the clause, while in other clauses (main, coordinate, or paratactic), the tensed verb or auxiliary occurs in second position, after the first constituent of the clause. Compare the position of the verb bist ‘you (SG) are’ in examples (6a-b). The verb-final word order of the reason clause in (6a) shows that weil is a subordinating conjunction, as predicted from the fact that it always introduces at-issue reason clauses. The verb-second word order of the reason clause in (6b) shows that denn is a paratactic conjunction, as predicted from the fact that it introduces supplemental reason clauses.

3 Translation issues

3.1 Pragmatic ambiguity

Our discussion in section 2 should help us to understand why Luke 7:47 is a challenging verse to translate, and why both the UBS Handbook and SIL’s Translator’s Notes recommend a significant restructuring of the passage. The Greek text for this passage contains a supplemental reason clause: “Her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much.” As we have seen, supplemental reason clauses in most if not all languages allow at least three interpretations: real-world causation, epistemic validation, and speech-act modifier. At-issue reason clauses, in contrast, generally do not permit the epistemic and speech-act interpretations. What this means is that any conjunction that allows the (correct) epistemic interpretation (“her love is evidence of forgiveness”) must be supplemental, and therefore will also allow the (incorrect) real-world causation interpretation (“her love caused the forgiveness”). And for many people the real-world causation reading seems to be the more prominent.

One reviewer points out that the second half of the verse (“he who is forgiven little, loves little”) should help the reader to select the intended reading. This is certainly true. The second half of the verse seems clearly to imply that the love is a consequence of the forgiveness, and by reading the first half in the same way (as intended), the verse as a whole is seen to have a chiastic structure. However, as a practical matter, it seems that even this is not enough to keep
many readers from adopting the wrong interpretation of the first half, and this is reflected in the strong warnings in the handbooks.

According to Sweetser, the ambiguous nature of supplemental causal conjunctions is pragmatic rather than semantic, relating to usage rather than sense; but for the translator, many of the same issues arise with either kind of ambiguity. Disambiguation often requires fairly complex reasoning based on awareness of contextual features (in this case, the meaning of the parable), shared cultural and world knowledge, pragmatic plausibility, etc.

In a monolingual, monocultural situation, ambiguity is rarely a problem. Much of what we hear every day is highly ambiguous, but we are normally not even aware of this unless we hear someone make a pun or some other kind of deliberate play on words. When communicating in our own language and culture, we normally disambiguate automatically and unconsciously.14 In a second language, or in a cross-cultural setting, disambiguation is frequently neither automatic nor unconscious, and translation is always a cross-cultural situation.

Because translators and consultants spend so much time studying the passages that we work on, there is a danger that we will underestimate the disambiguation challenge for uninitiated readers and hearers. I have heard translators justify ambiguous renderings of various kinds by saying something like, “They will understand it in context.” Obviously, this cannot be taken for granted, but needs to be carefully checked.

Pragmatic ambiguity will be a potential issue whenever a supplemental reason clause is used. One reason that Luke 7:47 calls for special attention is that two of the possible readings are equally plausible in the immediate context. In many other cases, one reading will clearly be the most plausible on pragmatic grounds, and this will certainly make disambiguation less difficult. However, even if the reader/hearer is able to correctly identify the intended reading, the very fact that we are dealing with translated material makes it less likely to be an automatic and unconscious process. The danger here is that readers may be sufficiently aware of the unintended readings that they are distracted by them. Of course, we cannot avoid every potential problem, and there are always trade-offs to be made; but as far as possible, I think we want to avoid producing translations that make people giggle every time they read a particular verse (a phenomenon I have witnessed in respected national language translations with other types of ambiguity).

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3.2 Substitution leads to change of semantic functions

Cranmer (1984) says that while checking the New Testament in a language of Sierra Leone, he noticed that the translator had on several occasions rendered a supplemental reason clause (‘for’) using an at-issue conjunction (‘because’). Based on his knowledge of a related language, he suspected that this could lead to misunderstandings in some contexts, and these suspicions turned out to be correct. Together they worked through every occurrence of ‘for’ in the book of Matthew, which resulted in a much-improved translation.

Why would replacing a supplemental reason clause with an at-issue reason clause cause problems? Our discussion in section 2 suggests at least two undesirable effects: change of semantic function and change of information packaging.

When a supplemental conjunction (‘for’) in the source language (SL) is used in the evidential or speech-act functions, translating it with an at-issue conjunction (‘because’) in the receptor language (RL) will normally force an unintended real-world causation interpretation. This follows from the fact noted above, that at-issue reason clauses generally do not permit the epistemic and speech-act interpretations.

One of the examples Cranmer cites is Matthew 8:8–9 (“But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 for I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me”). Verse 9 begins with a supplemental reason clause (a causal “digression”) functioning as a speech act modifier: it explains the centurion’s reason for making the assertion at the end of verse 8. As Cranmer points out, if we translate the supplemental conjunction (‘for’) with an at-issue conjunction, the plain meaning of the words will be that the centurion’s subordinate rank will cause the healing: “But just say the word, and my servant will be healed because I myself am a man under authority…” (with no intonation break after healed); or “But just say the word, and because I am a man under authority, my servant will be healed…”

Another example of a supplemental reason clause with the speech-act function is seen in (9a): the magi use it to explain what motivates their question. Replacing this with an at-issue reason clause, as in (9b), forces a real-world causation interpretation: it sounds as if their seeing the star caused the birth.

(9) SPEECH ACT (Matthew 2:2):
   a. Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? for we saw His star in the east...
   b. Where is He who has been born King of the Jews because we saw His star in the east?
The supplemental reason clause in (10a) is an example of the evidential function: Jesus uses it to explain how he knows that someone touched him. Replacing this with an at-issue reason clause, as in (10b), seems to force a real-world causation interpretation: His awareness of power going out from him caused the woman to touch him.15

(10) EVIDENTIAL (Luke 8:46):
   a. Someone touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me.
   b. #Someone touched me because I perceive that power has gone forth from me.

The real-world causation interpretation in examples (9b) and (10b) would be pragmatically highly unlikely, but grammatically it is strongly preferred if not obligatory. Asking readers to override their normal grammatical expectations on the basis of pragmatics is likely to cause significant distraction, if not outright laughter.

When a supplemental conjunction in the source language is used in the real-world causation function, translating it with an at-issue conjunction will not change the propositional content of the verse. However, it does change the INFORMATION PACKAGING: what was secondary, background information in the SL is presented as the main point of the utterance in the RL. Now sometimes this kind of re-packaging is unavoidable in order to communicate accurately the propositional content of the SL. But all other things being equal, most translators will probably favor preserving the information packaging of the SL when that is an option.

The opposite kind of substitution, when an at-issue conjunction in the SL is translated with a supplemental conjunction in the RL, may force a change in “scope” relations and thus produce an incorrect meaning, as discussed in the next section.

3.3 Scope relations

When an at-issue causal conjunction occurs in the context of negation, interrogative mood, or certain types of modality, two readings are (in general) grammatically possible. For example, the two sentences in (11) have the same grammatical structure, and in principle both are ambiguous. However, context makes it clear that the reason clause in (11a), but not (11b), must be understood to be negated. In other words, the reason clause in (11a) must be understood to lie within the SCOPE of the main clause negation, but this is not the intended

15 But see the discussion of structural ambiguity in section 4.
reading in (11b). We could paraphrase (11a) by saying, “He [Judas] did say this, but not because he cared about the poor.” This kind of paraphrase will not work for (11b), because in this case the context clearly requires the reading in which only the main clause and not the reason clause is negated.

(11) a. John 12:6—He [Judas] did not say this because he cared about the poor...
   b. Luke 9:53—But the people of the village did not welcome Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem. [NLT]

In many such cases no special adjustment will be needed, but we need to be aware of this type of ambiguity when it is present, and check carefully to be sure that disambiguation is not causing a problem for the intended readers, just as we do for any other semantic ambiguity.

If an at-issue conjunction in the SL is translated with a supplemental conjunction in the RL, the intended scope relations may be altered, because supplemental conjunctions cannot be interpreted within the scope of main-clause operators such as negation. We can illustrate this problem by returning to John 12:6. As we have just noted, this verse requires the reading in which the reason clause is understood to be negated (12a). If we replace at-issue because with supplemental for, as in (12b), this reading is no longer possible. Now only the main clause can be understood to be negated, and as a result the continuation (“but because he was a thief”) becomes incoherent.

(12) John 12:6—
   a. He [Judas] did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief.
   b. He did not say this, for he cared about the poor (*but because he was a thief).

Conversely, if a supplemental conjunction in the SL is translated with an at-issue conjunction in the RL (only possible when the reason clause expresses real-world causation), it may introduce a scope ambiguity into the translation which is not ambiguous in the SL. Example (13) illustrates this point using the parable of the wise builder who built his house upon the rock. In the standard rendering, with the supplemental conjunction for, only the main clause can be understood to be negated (13a). Replacing for with at-issue because as in (13b) introduces a second grammatically possible (but incorrect) reading: “the house did fall, but not because it had been founded on the rock.”

(13) Matthew 7:25—
   a. … it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.
   b. … it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.
4 Complicating factors

Up to this point we have focused on differences in semantic type (at-issue vs. supplemental) and range of semantic functions. However, other semantic factors may also be relevant for choosing the right causal conjunction in a specific language. For example, Dutch has two at-issue conjunctions, *omdat* and *doordat*, which both mean ‘because’. In some contexts, they are interchangeable, but only *omdat* can be used to express a volitional agent’s reason for doing something.16

Many languages have special causal conjunctions which mark the reason clause as being presupposed, that is, treated as part of the COMMON GROUND of shared knowledge between speaker/author and addressee. Examples include English causal *since*; French *puisque*; Latin *quoniam*; Dutch *aangezien*;17 and Spanish causal *como*, *puesto que*. Presupposed reason clauses are like supplements in that they are secondary (not part of the at-issue content), and in their range of semantic functions. The French and Spanish examples in (14) illustrate the speech act use, but evidential and real-world causation uses are also common.

(14) **Luke 1:34**—
  Comment cela se fera-t-il, *puisque* je suis vierge?18
  ¿Cómo podrá suceder esto—le preguntó María al ángel—, *puesto que* soy virgen?19
  “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” [NIV]

The main difference between presupposed vs. supplemental reason clauses is that supplemental reason clauses are normally informative, whereas presupposed reason clauses are not. If the content of a presupposed reason clause is not in fact already known by the addressee, the utterance may be judged to be unnatural or infelicitous.20 See Kroeger (2019) for a discussion of these issues as they relate to translation.

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17 Pit (2003:26).
18 La Bible du Semeur © 1992, 1999 Biblica Inc.
20 Similarly, supplemental reason clauses are typically judged to be infelicitous when their content has been just mentioned in the immediately preceding context, because they are uninformative (Potts 2005). However, it seems to be the case that the more distant the previous mention was, the more acceptable such uninformative supplements become.
4.1 Polysemous conjunctions

Perhaps the most important complicating factor regarding the uses of causal conjunctions is the fact that some of these conjunctions turn out to be polysemous. It is possible, and apparently not at all uncommon, for a subordinating conjunction to acquire a secondary paratactic sense. One widely cited example of this pattern is the French conjunction parce que ‘because’, which in its primary sense introduces subordinate at-issue reason clauses. Over the past thousand years or so, it has developed a secondary sense which shares the supplemental semantics and paratactic syntax of car ‘for’.21 Car is now rarely used in spoken French, having been largely replaced by paratactic parce que. The equivalence between paratactic parce que and car is illustrated in (15), with an evidential example, and (16) where the reason clause functions as a speech act modifier.

(15) Mark 14:7022—

a. Vraiment, tu es de ces gens-là, car tu es aussi galiléen. [NBS]
   “Truly you are one of those people, for you too are a Galilean.”

b. Certainement, tu es l’un d’eux, parce que, toi aussi, tu es de la Galilée. [FCR18]
   “Surely you are one of them, because you also, you are from Galilee.”


a. Mon ami, prête-moi trois pains, car un de mes amis est arrivé de voyage chez moi, et je n’ai rien à lui offrir. [NBS]
   “My friend, lend me three loaves, for one of my friends has arrived at my house on a journey, and I have nothing to offer him.”

b. Mon ami, prête-moi trois pains, parce qu’un de mes amis m’est arrivé de voyage et je n’ai rien à lui offrir. [TOB]
   “My friend, lend me three loaves, because one of my friends has arrived to me on a journey and I have nothing to offer him.”

The subordinate and paratactic senses of parce que can be distinguished by phonological and syntactic criteria. Paratactic reason clauses are not fully integrated into the main clause. This is marked phonologically by a pause and/or intonation boundary, usually (but not always) indicated in writing with a comma, as seen in (15b) and (16b). No pause precedes the conjunction in at-issue contexts, like those in examples (17a) and (18a). Lack of syntactic integration is also seen

in the fact that paratactic reason clauses are not eligible to undergo certain syntactic operations which are fully grammatical with subordinate reason clauses. Examples include the various kinds of cleft constructions illustrated in (17b, c) and (18b). The acceptability of these sentences indicates that they involve the subordinate, rather than the paratactic, sense of parce que.

(17) John 6:26—
   a. [FCR18] vous me cherchez, non parce que vous avez saisi le sens des signes extraordinaires que j’accomplis, mais parce que vous avez mangé du pain à votre faim.
   “You search for me, not because you have understood the meaning of the extraordinary signs that I perform, but because you have had eaten your fill of bread.”
   b. [TOB] ce n’est pas parce que vous avez vu des signes que vous me cherchez...
   “It is not because you saw signs that you are looking for me...”
   c. [BDS] si vous me cherchez, ce n’est pas parce que vous avez compris le sens de mes signes miraculeux...
   (lit.) “If you are searching for me, it is not because you have understood the meaning of my miraculous signs...”

(18) John 12:6—
   a. [FCR18] Il disait cela non parce qu’il se souciait des pauvres, mais parce qu’il était voleur
   “He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief.”
   b. [BDS] S’il parlait ainsi, ce n’était pas parce qu’il se souciait des pauvres...
   “If he spoke thus, it was not because he cared about the poor...”

English because also has both subordinating and paratactic uses. The two are distinguished by the comma intonation, which is strongly preferred (if not obligatory) in the paratactic structure but not possible with true subordinate structure, as illustrated in (19). Notice the change in meaning which is forced when the pause is inserted in (19b): the reason clause is no longer understood to be what is negated, and so the final clause no longer makes sense.

(19) John 12:6—
   a. He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief.
   b. He did not say this, because he cared about the poor (*but because he was a thief).
Subordinating *because* will normally be interpreted as contributing at-issue content, and therefore describing real-world causation. Paratactic *because*, which has largely replaced causal *for* in modern spoken English, can be used to express all three of the semantic functions discussed in section 2: real-world causation (20a), evidential (20b), and speech act (20c):

(20) a. **Matthew 7:25**—
...but it did not fall, *because* it had been founded on the rock. [ESV]
...and yet it did not fall, *for* it had been founded on the rock. [NASB]

b. **Matthew 16:2**—
When the sun is setting, you say, “We are going to have fine weather, *because* the sky is red.” [TEV]

c. **Luke 19:5**—
“Hurry down, Zacchaeus, *because* I must stay in your house today.” [TEV]

However, intonation or pause by itself is not always a reliable guide for distinguishing subordinating from paratactic *because*. More precisely, the presence of the comma intonation does seem to mark the construction as paratactic, but the absence of the comma does not always mean that the speaker or author intends to express a subordinate, at-issue reason clause. Doubtful cases can be clarified by using syntactic tests such as the cleft construction.

The intended reading for the paratactic reason clause in (21a) is evidential (Jesus’ awareness of power going out from him is the grounds for his assertion that someone touched him). The real-world causation reading (his awareness of power going out from him caused the woman to touch him) is grammatically possible with the paratactic construction, but in this case pragmatically bizarre. The NLV rendering shown in (21b), which leaves out the comma, looks like a subordinate reason clause. But if this were the case, only the incorrect real-world causation reading would be grammatically possible.

(21) **Luke 8:46**—
a. Someone touched me, *because* I felt power going out from me. [CEV]
b. Someone touched Me because I know power has gone from Me. [NLV]
c. It was *because* I know power has gone from me that someone touched me. [invented]

---

23 Unless the context strongly requires a different interpretation.

24 In principle the third, speech act reading is also possible for this sentence, but in this specific example it would be virtually indistinguishable from the evidential reading.
I suggest that (21b) is ambiguous between subordinate vs. paratactic structure, at least when intonation is unspecified. However, only the subordinate structure can be paraphrased as a cleft sentence, as illustrated in (21c). As this example demonstrates, it is difficult to interpret the clefted version as expressing anything other than real-world causation, the normal interpretation for subordinate reason clauses, in spite of the pragmatic implausibility of this reading.

The fact that (21b) allows the correct reading, in contrast to (21c), can be explained in terms of structural ambiguity. However, getting the correct reading seems to require the reader to interpret the two clauses as having separate intonation contours. Reading the whole sentence with a single intonation contour strongly favors the incorrect real-world causation reading, at least in my judgment. I do not claim that the correct interpretation is impossible in (21b); but for a reader with little or no previous knowledge of the Bible, omitting the comma makes the disambiguation task more challenging. In general, when the language makes it possible to avoid the kind of structural ambiguity observed in (21b), it will generally be helpful to do so.

4.2 Coercion effects

Finally, I would like to make some preliminary observations about another complicating factor, one which requires more investigation. It appears that under special circumstances, a subordinating causal conjunction can be “coerced” into taking on an evidential interpretation. (The term COERCION refers to a process which occurs when a word or grammatical morpheme is used in a context which is incompatible with its normal sense, forcing the addressee to identify a modified sense that will be appropriate in that context.25) An apparent example is seen in the German example (22a):

(22) John 9:16—
   a. Dieser Mensch ist nicht von Gott, weil er den Sabbat nicht hält.  
      [LU84]
   b. This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath.  
      [RSV, NIV]
   c. Because this man does not keep the sabbath, [we know that] he is  
      not from God. [invented]

25 The term COERCION was originally coined by Moens and Steedman (1988) in a discussion of tense and aspect. I am using the term in a broader sense which can include even coerced shifts in lexical meaning such as Mark Twain’s reference to a certain person as “a good man in the worst sense of the word.”
The intended meaning of the reason clause in this verse is clearly evidential/epistemic: the fact that Jesus does not observe some of the sabbath regulations is presented as evidence which demonstrates, and thus provides grounds for asserting, that he is not from God. The English rendering in (22b) is almost a word-for-word gloss of the German, except that it uses the supplemental conjunction for, as expected with the evidential reading. The German version in (22a) uses the at-issue conjunction weil with verb-final word order, indicating a true subordinate structure.

As discussed in section 2, at-issue conjunctions like weil typically do not allow the evidential/epistemic usage. However, German speakers I have consulted say that the intended reading is indeed possible for (22a). I suggest that this is made possible by a type of coercion that involves inferring an implicit epistemic component, that is, a statement of knowing, as suggested in the bracketed material in (22c). (The fronting of the reason clause in (22c) is used to ensure that the sentence involves the at-issue, subordinating sense of because.) This epistemic component is made explicit in some German versions with the use of the modal auxiliary kann ‘can’ in its epistemic sense, as illustrated in (23).26

(23) John 9:16—
Von Gott kann dieser Mann nicht kommen,
from God can this man not come
denn er hält sich nicht an die Sabbatgebote.
for he holds REFLECT not at the Sabbath.commandments
“This man cannot come from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath commandments.” [HFA]

The proposed coercion effect is triggered by a combination of factors. First, the expected at-issue interpretation (real world causation) would not make sense here: not keeping the Sabbath now cannot cause him not to have come from God. Second, the immediate discourse context involves a debate over Jesus’s identity (is he a true prophet?) based on the interpretation of conflicting evidence (Sabbath violations vs. amazing miracles). This context would tend to make the addressee more ready to choose the evidential reading for the reason clause, even though the grammatical form of the clause suggests a different reading. I think the same kind of coercion might be possible in English as well: “Because this man does not keep the Sabbath, he is not from God.” In the context of a debate among the religious leaders, I could imagine this being said as a statement of evidence.

26 See also the Gute Nachricht ‘Good News’ version.
Another apparent example of this type is seen in the French rendering of Luke 7:47 shown in (24):

(24) **Luke 7:47—**

...ses nombreux pêchés ont été pardonnés
her many since have been forgiven

*parce que* elle a manifesté beaucoup d’amour.
because she has shown much of love

“...her many sins have been forgiven because she has shown great love.” [FCR18]

As noted in the preceding section, when (as here) *parce que* is used without a comma it normally expresses the at-issue, subordinating sense, which should allow only a causal interpretation. In order to get the intended evidential reading for this rendering, readers must either apply the kind of epistemic coercion proposed for the previous example or interpret the reason clause as an unmarked paratactic construction. An important difference between this example and the previous one is that in this example, either reading makes good sense in the immediate discourse context. Only by thinking back to the parable in vv. 41–43 can the reader rule out the causal interpretation, which would otherwise be favored by the structure of this sentence.

The first two French speakers that I checked with said they felt that the causal interpretation was the only possible reading for (24). Then I talked with a French pastor who said that the sentence is ambiguous between the causal and evidential meanings; the choice between them would be based on theological factors. My conclusion is that the rendering in (24) allows the correct meaning (possibly via epistemic coercion), but this intended meaning might not occur to readers who do not have a high level of Bible literacy.

5 Conclusion

In summary, we have considered two types of reason clauses: “at-issue” vs. supplemental. An at-issue reason clause expresses a literal causal relation between two propositions ("real-world causation"). Both the propositional content of the reason clause and the causal relation itself are part of the main point that is being asserted or questioned. Supplemental reason clauses, on the other hand, are not part of the main point. They provide secondary or background-type information that the speaker believes will assist the addressee in processing the at-issue content of the utterance.

Supplemental reason clauses can express real-world causation, but even when they do the information that they provide is not interpreted as being part
of the main point. Supplemental reason clauses also allow a range of other uses, among which we have focused on the evidential/epistemic and speech act uses. For this reason, supplemental reason clauses present the addressee (i.e., the reader) with an ambiguity of usage (pragmatic ambiguity). In many contexts it will be clear which reading is intended, but we need to remember that disambiguation is always more difficult in a cross-cultural situation (including translated material) than in our own language and culture. At-issue reason clauses do not normally give rise to this kind of pragmatic ambiguity.

At-issue reason clauses are normally subordinated, i.e., fully integrated into the syntactic structure of the main clause. For this reason, they may give rise to semantic ambiguities of “scope” when the main clause is marked for clausal negation, interrogative mood, certain kinds of modality, etc. Once again, we need to check carefully to be sure that the intended readers of the translation are able to disambiguate without confusion or distraction. This kind of scope ambiguity generally does not arise with supplemental reason clauses because they are not subordinate in structure but paratactic.

Translating a supplemental reason clause in the SL with an at-issue reason clause in the RL, or vice versa, will affect the information packaging of the verse, because in one type the reason clause is interpreted as being part of the main point of the utterance, but not in the other type. However, because different languages have different inventories of grammatical markers and structures for expressing causal relations, there will be situations where this is unavoidable. In such situations, it is important to be aware of how this kind of substitution may affect the range of possible readings. Translating an at-issue reason clause with a supplemental reason clause can introduce an ambiguity of usage, e.g., by making an evidential or speech act reading possible where it is not in the original. It may also block certain interpretations involving scope of negation, questioning, etc., that were permitted in the original. This should not be a problem unless, of course, the correct, intended reading is blocked. Translating a supplemental reason clause with an at-issue reason clause can have the opposite effects.
References


Honorifics and the Japanese Bible
Goliath is “Ruder” than Pharaoh?

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Abstract: This paper is dedicated to the study of honorifics (lexically, morphologically, and/or grammatically marked polite/appropriate speech or language) in Bible translation. It includes a brief history of honorific studies, definitions of important terms (e.g., honorifics vs. politeness), challenges of honorifics in general, sociolinguistic factors or rules in Japanese honorifics, how honorifics are reflected in the Japanese Bible (e.g., pronouns, titles, familial terms, in-group vs. out-group, verbal honorifics including prefixes, suffixes, benefactives, imperatives), and specific issues or challenges found in the Japanese Bible. Unfortunately, the original languages of the Bible do not have much to say about honorifics. As such, translators are faced with difficult decisions, as the language may require every utterance to be marked as either “polite” or “casual” to some degree, i.e., one cannot keep the level of politeness “neutral.”

I approach this issue of honorifics in Bible translation by observing how honorifics are reflected in one of the most read versions of the Japanese Bible, Shinkaiyaku Seisho 2017 ‘New Japanese Bible 2017,’ mainly focusing on the conversational discourse found within the New Testament, and particularly the Gospel according to Matthew. My hope is that this paper will contribute to raising awareness of honorifics, and at the same time provide some clues and a framework for those who are translating the Bible into languages which utilize them.
# Abbreviations

## 1. Bibles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kyōdōyaku ’18</td>
<td>Seishokyōkaikyōdōyaku Seisho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyōdōyaku ’87</td>
<td>Shinkyōdōyaku Seisho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>New American Standard Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET</td>
<td>New English Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinkaiyaku ’03</td>
<td>Shinkaiyaku Seisho (*third edition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinkaiyaku ’17</td>
<td>Shinkaiyaku Seisho 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinkaiyaku ’78</td>
<td>Shinkaiyaku Seisho (*second edition)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 2. Technical Terms

- #    : semantically ill-formed
- -    : affix
- 1    : first person
- 2    : second person
- 3    : third person
- =    : clitic boundary
- ?    : questionable
- H    : humble form
- T    : lower register
- V    : higher register
- BEN  : benefactive
- CAUS : causative
- CON  : connective *(te/de)*
- DAT  : dative
- F    : feminine
- GEN  : genitive
- HON  : honorific
- M    : masculine
- PL   : plural
- PST  : past tense
- SG   : singular
- Ø    : pro-drop
1 Introduction to honorifics

This paper examines honorifics (i.e., lexically, morphologically, and/or grammatically marked polite/appropriate speech/language) in Bible translation. For instance, in some cultures, referring to a pastor simply as “John” would be extremely rude and socially unacceptable. To show appropriate respect, pastors may have to be referred to as “Pastor Smith,” “Reverend Smith” (if ordained), or perhaps something along the lines of “Teacher Smith.” In such societies, referring to Jesus simply as “Jesus” can convey a very wrong message, e.g., people might perceive Jesus as not important or does not deserve respect. In such languages, it may also be rude to refer to God with a pronoun such as “You” or “He.”

Unfortunately, the source languages of the Bible (mainly ancient Hebrew and Greek) do not have much to say about honorifics. Persons who are not familiar with honorifics may think, “If the Bible does not show desirable levels of honorifics for translation purposes, why don’t we translate them into a default neutral politeness?” Unfortunately, the reality can be much more complicated than it seems. Target languages such as Japanese require every utterance to be marked either as “polite” or “casual” to some degree (i.e., one cannot keep the level of politeness “neutral”). In other words, for native Japanese speakers, employing honorifics is not limited to special occasions or speakers with special roles but rather is a norm. Furthermore, in languages such as Japanese in which the employment of honorifics reflects not only the “closeness” but also the hierarchical relationship, the accurate employment of appropriate language is crucial in developing and maintaining harmonious relationships.

Underlyingly, it is important to realize that the employment of honorifics expresses something regarding the relationship between people, but the

3 Coulmas (1992).
4 In fact, politeness is a “universal phenomenon,” and thus is simply an unavoidable translation issue to one degree or another. Even a common phrase in English such as, “Don’t be so polite,” is in fact still within the realm of the politeness principle as one is being “polite” within the culture by “not being polite.” That is to say, in American culture the way one treats someone “politely” is to lower the level of formality and treat them as if they are a friend, as reflected in the common phrase, “Make yourself at home,” or in comments such as, “Please don’t call me ‘Mr. Johnson’. That’s my father. Please call me ‘Dave’!” Therefore, though often overlooked, “politeness” is an unavoidable translation issue as it is a fundamental aspect of any communication in any society (Blum-Kulka 1992:255).
nonemployment of honorifics also expresses something else. Based on this sociolinguistic context, “politeness” is an absolutely necessary issue to consider in Japanese Bible translation. At the same time, many difficult questions arise. Was the Devil speaking politely when he was tempting Jesus? Were the challenging Pharisees speaking impolitely but well-intended Pharisees speaking politely to Jesus? Was Jesus speaking politely to Pilate, as he was the governor? Or was He not, as one who said of Himself, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Mat 28:18)? These are just a few examples of the difficult decisions translators might have to make when translating the Bible into languages with honorifics.

This paper approaches this issue of honorifics in Bible translation primarily by observing how honorifics are reflected in one of the two most read versions of the Japanese Bible, Shinkaiyaku Seisho 2017 ‘New Japanese Bible 2017’ (from here on Shinkaiyaku ‘17 or simply “the Japanese Bible”), and when necessary, in comparison with its older versions, mainly focusing on conversational discourses found within the New Testament (from here on NT), and particularly the Gospel according to Matthew (from here on Matthew).

2 The definition of politeness and honorifics

Like any study of linguistic phenomena, it is imperative to define important terms and refrain from presupposing a mutual understanding. Especially knowing that we are dealing with a “universal linguistic phenomenon” (in a sense that politeness is found in every language and society to some degree), this is crucial, as Ide et al. (1992) have wisely warned, “we cannot assume that the concept of ‘politeness’ is fully equivalent to the concepts of corresponding terms

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7 For word searches for Shinkaiyaku ’17 (and its older versions), I used the official website of Shin Nihon Seisho Kankōkai ‘New Japan Bible Publishing Society’: https://seisho.or.jp/biblesearch/. As for Kyōdōyaku ’18 (and its older version), I used the official website of Nihon Seisho Kyōkai ‘Japan Bible Society’: https://bible.or.jp/read/vers_search.html.

8 Unless otherwise specified, English Bible citations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). In keeping with that translation, pronouns in this paper which refer to God and Jesus have been capitalized.
in other languages, since language itself is the door to a concept in people’s minds.”9

As for a concise contrast of the two concepts “politeness” and “honorifics,” Cho (2009) defines them as follows: “Politeness, as a universal concept, is thus related to discourse and usage; whereas honorifics, as a specific morphology, are concerned with grammatical structure…. As a result, politeness is applicable to all languages, whereas honorifics are manifested in some languages” (emphasis mine).10 The bottom line is, as she puts it brilliantly, politeness is

a matter of balance between appearing rude and appearing too polite. According to the relationship between interlocutors, the balance of politeness can be proposed as being overpolite, being appropriately polite, being underpolite, and being impolite. The balance of politeness is dependent upon the dynamics of interpersonal activity and is not just a static logical concept (emphasis mine).11

This paper defines linguistic politeness as the appropriate language reflecting one’s place within one’s society in relative relationship to the interlocutor(s) and referent(s);12 and honorifics simply as linguistic politeness marked lexically, morphologically, and/or grammatically. Having these definitions for fundamental terms is a helpful starting point when studying the system of honorifics and its registers (different levels/kinds of word/phrase forms including honorifics) in the target language.

It is also important to be aware that politeness and honorifics are not invariably in a relationship of proportionality. In other words, employment of higher honorifics does not necessarily communicate higher respect from the speaker. In fact, since politeness is about appropriateness, depending on the context, being overly polite can be impolite if not outright rude. Whether the utterance is polite or impolite in a given context is, for the most part, determined by the social norms rooted in various social and cultural expectations. Therefore, it may be said that politeness can be conveyed when one is neither uninvitedly casual nor exceedingly proper. In other words, being polite is to behave with the right level of formality expected by the context including age, gender, social status, relationship, occasion, and various other social factors. This is why, linguistically, being polite would refer to the employment of the appropriate level of register to the given context.

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9 Ide et al. (1992:282).
10 Cho (2009:10). Cho also defines honorifics as “special linguistic forms that are used as signs of deference toward the addressee(s) or the nominal referents” (Cho 2009:4).
3 Multiple cultural factors in Japanese honorifics

There are multiple factors that contribute to the selection of a register within an utterance. They are all considered together to choose the most appropriate register in the given context. There are various frameworks (angles) to look at these criteria when examining honorifics. Coulmas (1992) provides three social factors that contribute to Japanese honorifics: 1) Relative Status (superior vs. inferior); 13) 2) Group Membership (“in-group” vs. “out-group”); and 3) Gender (male vs. female). Ide (2009) gives four Japanese social rules of politeness: be polite 1) to a person of higher social position; 2) to a person with power; 3) to an older person; and 4) in a formal setting determined by the factors of participants, occasions, and topics. This chapter examines perhaps the most crucial (but most complicated) notion of group membership.

In this group membership, there are two cognitively/socially distinguished groups: *uchi* ‘in-group’ and *soto* ‘out-group’ (lit., ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ respectively). Coulmas (1992) describes this concept as follows:

The general principle is that reference to self and members of one’s own group—i.e., family, school, company, etc.—is modest/humble when talking to others, whereas reference to others is respectful.... *Addressing* someone by (first or last) name only indicates intimacy, while *referring* to someone by name only merely indicates group membership as well as the required awareness that honorifics are inappropriate when referring to in-group members toward outsiders (emphasis mine).

The following scenario from Coulmas (1992) is an excellent example to depict this phenomenon of *uchi* vs. *soto*. Here the secretary refers to her boss simply by name (without any title), which she will absolutely not do with the customer. While the customer refers to the secretary’s boss as ‘Mr. Tanaka’ with a title *-san* and uses the *respectful form* of the verb ‘is’ in reference to him, the secretary refers to her boss simply as ‘Tanaka’ without any title and uses the *humble form* of the verb (more on this later):

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19 Adapted and modified from Coulmas (1992:311).
(a) Customer:
Tanaka-san-wa Pari kara kaet-te irasshai-masu ka
Mr. Tanaka-topic Paris from returned is [+respect] Question
‘Has Mr. Tanaka returned from Paris?’

(b) Secretary:
Tanaka-∅=wa mada kaet-te ori-masen
∅. Tanaka-topic yet returned is [+humble]-not
‘Tanaka has not returned yet.’

This in-group vs. out-group concept is not limited to the corporate world but is also apparent in other social domains including family. For example, an individual may refer to an out-group member’s father as o-tō-sama (V) [+respect] (note the honorific prefix o- and title -sama), but refers to one’s own father as chichi (V) [+humble] in front of others, since “It is not polite to respect the speaker’s own [parent] in the presence of a respected addressee.”20 However, when one is speaking directly to his/her father or making a reference to him in his/her in-group, he may be referred to as o-tō-san (T).21

4 Honorifics and the Japanese Bible

As mentioned above, Japanese honorifics are marked linguistically, i.e., lexically, morphologically, and/or grammatically. Furthermore, it was explained that the selection of a register (level/type of honorifics) within any utterance is imperative, playing a crucial role not only in politeness but appropriateness and naturalness. This chapter presents how Japanese honorifics are reflected in the Japanese Bible and examines translation challenges/issues that can be observed from it.

4.1 Familial address

As was briefly mentioned, familial terms are difficult to translate precisely in Japanese because there is politeness involved. The table below lists seven ways ‘father’ is translated in the Japanese Bible (Shinkaiyaku ’17), all from the same Hebrew or Greek word. The classification of T (lower register) or V (higher register) in this paper is allocated simply in relative terms (based on my intuition).

21 Though o-tō-san ‘father (T)’ by form appears to be a polite reference with both the honorific prefix and the title, it is still a casual/familiar address as it has become conventionalized and has lost its formal sense over the years.
Table 1: ‘Father’ in the Japanese Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Father’</th>
<th>“Formal” context</th>
<th>“Informal” context</th>
<th>Antiquity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chichi-oya (T/V)</td>
<td></td>
<td>first/second/third person’s father</td>
<td>contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-tō-san (T)</td>
<td></td>
<td>first/second/third person’s father</td>
<td>contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-tō-sama (V)</td>
<td>first/second/third person’s father</td>
<td></td>
<td>contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chichi (V/H)</td>
<td>first person’s father</td>
<td></td>
<td>contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chichi-ue (V)</td>
<td>first/second/third person’s father</td>
<td></td>
<td>archaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-chichi-ue (VV)</td>
<td>second/third person’s father</td>
<td></td>
<td>archaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chichi-gimi (VVV)</td>
<td>second/third person’s father</td>
<td></td>
<td>archaic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While o-tō-san (T) is found only nineteen times throughout the Japanese Bible, the higher register counterpart o-tō-sama (V) is even rarer and is only found in two verses ( Judges 11:36; Luke 15:27). The parable of the prodigal son provides a nice contrast of these two forms: while the brothers in the parable refer to their father as o-tō-san (Luke 15:12, 29), the servant refers to his master as o-tō-sama when speaking to his master’s son, as contrasted below:

1. “Father [o-tō-san (T)], give me the share of the estate that is coming to me” ( Luke 15:12).
2. “Your brother has come, and your father [o-tō-sama (V)] has slaughtered the fattened calf” (Luke 15:27).

Although o-tō-sama is classified as V, chichi is classified as V/H in the table above. This is because the politeness works differently for the two honorific forms of ‘father.’ While the former pays respect to the second or third person by “elevating” the referent father, the latter pays respect to the interlocutor(s) by “humbling” one’s father. Since it is a humble form, chichi is usually used only in reference to the speaker’s father and not anyone else’s father. Thus, it is appropriate for a disciple to refer to his father as chichi before his Rabbi Jesus and for Joseph’s brothers to do the same before the ruler of Egypt (Joseph):

3. “Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father [chichi (V/H)]” (Matthew 8:21).
(4) “Your servant our father [chichi (V/H)] is well; he is still alive” (Genesis 43:28).

However, since the humble form chichi (V/H) is usually chosen to express humility in the presence of other(s), it is rather strange that Lot’s eldest daughter “humbly” refers to her own father as chichi when speaking to her sister (who is not only younger but also an in-group member):

(5) “Our father [chichi (V/H)] is old” (Genesis 19:31).

In this context of sisters speaking of their father, it would be more natural if it were o-tō-san (T) or o-tō-sama (V). In fact, the previous edition Shinkaiyaku ’03 has translated it as o-tō-san (T).

Another challenge is that Jesus also refers to God the Father as chichi (V/H) as well, contributing much to its highest occurrence of the word ‘father’ in the Japanese Bible:

(6) “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father [chichi (V/H)]” (Matthew 11:27).

The complexity of this translation issue perhaps lies in the fact that while chichi (V/H) in conversational discourse is the third-person reference to one’s father in humility before the presence of others, it is completely natural and appropriate for chichi to be used in other discourse types, such as in poetic or narration discourse.22 One may criticize this translation, saying Jesus should not (or even cannot) humble His Father in the presence of others. Or perhaps this translation decision is motivated by the intention to give Jesus (and Father God) “extra dignity” by employing chichi in a classical sense which does not carry the humble sense.

4.2 Address/reference for first, second, and third person

Though it may be surprising for some, translating pronouns, a seemingly simple process, requires a deep understanding of each culture.23 As for Japanese, there are many pronouns (literally dozens), especially if historical (such as thou for ‘you’ in English) and dialectical (such as y’all in Southern states) counterparts are

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22 Prayer: “Our Father [chichi], who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9); Proverb: “HONOR YOUR FATHER [chichi] AND MOTHER” (Matthew 15:4), or in narration discourse as in “Going on from there He saw two other brothers...in the boat with their father [chichi] Zebedee” (Matthew 4:21). In these discourse types, chichi does not carry the “humble” sense.

also to be included. When it comes to addressing or referring to someone within a conversation (including oneself), Japanese speakers follow various socio-linguistic rules (such as the relationship with other interlocutors and occasions) to make the appropriate choice.

4.2.1 Honorific affixes on nouns and proper names

Before going into actual terms of address/reference, this section introduces the honorific affixes which often appear alongside pronouns. These honorific prefixes and suffixes are commonly found in Japanese conversations, each carrying different connotations and levels of politeness.

4.2.1.1 Honorific prefixes

There are five honorific prefixes in Japanese, as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Register</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o-</td>
<td>o-tegami ‘letter’</td>
<td>T/V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go-</td>
<td>go-han ‘(cooked) rice’</td>
<td>T/V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on-</td>
<td>on-sha ‘company’</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gyo-</td>
<td>gyo-i ‘will, desire’</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mi-</td>
<td>mi-na ‘name (of God)’</td>
<td>VVV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Basically, every noun can receive one of these honorific prefixes according to its lexical class/group. The most common honorific prefixes in the Japanese Bible are o-, go-, and mi-, and they can be found on nouns or verbs:

(7) “And I brought him to Your disciples [o-deshi-tachi]” (Matthew 17:16).
(8) “Sir [go-shujin-sama], did you not sow good seed in your field?” (Matthew 13:27).

Lexically, the prefix mi- is special as it is used to pay respect to gods or the Imperial family. Therefore, Japanese Christians have adopted this concept and use this prefix in many instances when referring to God, as can be found throughout the Japanese Bible.

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24 God(s) and the imperial family are grouped together according to Kokka Shintō ‘State Shintōism’, which stands on the narrative that the Japanese imperial family are the descendants of gods.
4.2.1.2 Honorific suffix keishō (“title”)

Most of the time, last names and first names are accompanied by different types of “titles” in Japanese, with a gradation from formal to casual, some common examples being -sama, -san, -kun, and -chan. These suffix titles are functionally (but roughly) equivalent to English titles (e.g., ‘Mr.,’ ‘Mrs.,’ ‘Ms.,’ ‘Sir,’ or ‘Madam/Lady’). The choice for the term of address is influenced by various factors, including the gender and age of the interlocutors. The table below reflects a simple and generic usage of each keishō “title.”

Table 3: Honorific suffix Keishō (“title”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Titles”</th>
<th>Literary</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Old</th>
<th>Young</th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Casual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-dono (V)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-shi (V)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-sama (V)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-san (V/T)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kun (T)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-chan (T)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intriguingly, none of the keishō except for -sama (V) is found in the Japanese Bible. If these proper keishō are absent in modern Japanese, usually such a reference carries a familiar/friendly, casual, or rude connotation, although the lack of titles can also be appropriate in some professional settings. As for -sama, it can be found after names, pronouns, and title/relationship terms in the Japanese Bible, as illustrated in the following examples:

(10) “Jesus [Iesu-sama (V)], Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47)
(11) “Lord, I am not worthy for You [anata-sama (V-V)] to come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8).
(12) “Hail, King [ō-sama (V)] of the Jews!” (Matthew 27:29)

Although Jesus’ name is followed by -sama (V) in the Mark 10:47 passage above, this is surprisingly extremely rare, occurring only seven times throughout the NT. Elsewhere, it is consistently “omitted”: angels referring to Jesus (Acts 1:11), and even the apostle Peter referring to Jesus (e.g., Acts 1:16). However, the two disciples heading to Emmaus do refer to Jesus as iesu-sama ‘Jesus (V)’ with

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25 These are the referent’s gender and age group.
the title (Luke 24:19, 23). The translation decision behind these distinctions is unclear:

(13) “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus [Iesu-∅], who has been taken up from you into heaven” (Acts 1:11).
(14) “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus [Iesu-∅]” (Acts 1:16).
(15) “Those about Jesus [Iesu-sama (V)] the Nazarene, who proved to be a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people” (Luke 24:19).

4.2.2 First-person address/reference

As for Japanese pronouns, similarly to familial terms, the distinction cannot be made simply by a T vs. V contrast, as there are more varieties of choices, each with different connotations. As mentioned above, since linguistic politeness is not necessarily binary but rather a gradation ranging from the lowest to the highest register, it should include inappropriate words such as derogatory/crude “belittling” words (labeled as TT or even TTT) which are, strictly speaking, not honorifics.

Table 4: First-person pronouns in the Japanese Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-person pronoun</th>
<th>Gender of speaker</th>
<th>Age of speaker</th>
<th>Antiquity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ware (VV)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Semi-archaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa (VV)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Semi-archaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watakushi (VV)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watashi (V/T)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults/Children</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jibun (T)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ore (TT)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Adults/Children</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Japanese Bible employs six first-person pronouns. The semi-archaic26 literary form ware (VV) gives a formal and grand impression (and a sense of dignity). This plural form is used more than 252 times throughout the Japanese Bible, spoken by both God and humans. Another semi-archaic form ware-ra

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26 The pronouns ware and wa are labeled “semi-archaic” based on the descriptive usage in modern Japanese. They are basically no longer spoken in regular daily conversation, but are still used in some formal speech and writing.
appears twenty-five times, mostly in poetic discourses such as in Psalms or prayers.27

The most common first-person pronoun found in the Japanese Bible is *watashi* (V/T), appearing more than 16,100 times. Jesus referred to Himself as *watashi* even when he was a boy:

(16) “Did you not know that I [watashi (V)] had to be in My [jibun=no ‘self=GEN’] Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49)

This choice of pronoun is rather unnatural, as no modern Japanese twelve- or thirteen-year-old boys would refer to themselves as *watashi* (V). Rather they would either say *boku* (T) or perhaps *ore* (TT). Not only is Jesus speaking with a higher register to his parents as a young boy, but He is also employing high honorifics throughout His utterance, such as on the predicates. This would most likely appear unnaturally formal/proper from modern readers’ perspectives.

The least common first-person pronoun found in the Japanese Bible is *jibun* (T). While the Japanese Bible often employs *jibun* as a second- or third-person reflexive pronoun, this paper accounts only those which are “pure” first-person pronouns (i.e., non-reflexive pronouns). I was only able to find two clear cases of non-reflexive *jibun* in the Japanese Bible: a landowner in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 20:15) and the evil spirit in Acts 19:15:

(17) “Is it not lawful for me [∅] to do what I [jibun (T)] want with what is my [jibun=no ‘self=GEN’] own?” (Matthew 20:15)

(18) “I [jibun (T)] recognize Jesus, and I [∅] know about Paul, but who are you?” (Acts 19:15)

While the employment of *jibun* as a “pure” first-person pronoun (i.e., not reflexive neither bound by any specific grammatical pattern) appears to be very infrequently used in the Japanese Bible, it is not clear as to why *jibun* is chosen over others in these two passages.

The second uncommon first-person pronoun *ore* (TT) appears only fifteen times: thirteen times in the OT and twice in the NT. It is chosen when the utterance is from criminals or enemy gentiles within the context of war.28 While

27 e.g., Genesis 24:60; Psalm 46:1; Isaiah 61:2; Mark 11:10.
28 Jonathan speaking from the point of view of the Philistine garrison (1 Samuel 14:9, 10); the Philistine garrison: “Come on up to us [ore-tachi] so we can teach you a thing or two!” (1 Samuel 14:12 [NET]); Goliath: “Am I [ore (TT)] not the Philistine, and you the servants of Saul?” (1 Samuel 17:8; also 17:9, 43); David speaking from the point of view of his enemy: “And my enemy will say, ‘I [ore] have overcome him’” (Psalm 13:4); and the criminals on the cross: “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us [ore-tachi]!” (Luke 23:39); “And we [ore-tachi] indeed are suffering justly” (Luke 23:41).
some enemies/criminals in the Japanese Bible refer to themselves as *ore* (TT), most of the “antagonists” in both the OT and the NT do not follow the same pattern but refer to themselves as *watashi* (V). The issue with the contrast between antagonists’ *watashi* (V) and *ore* (TT) is that those few individuals such as Goliath appear much more crude and vicious in comparison to others such as Pharaoh, and therefore appear (unnecessarily?) more evil than others:\(^{29}\)

(19) “Am I [*ore* (TT)] not the Philistine, and you the servants of Saul?” (1 Samuel 17:8)

(20) “Who is the LORD that I [*watashi* (V)] should obey His voice to let Israel go?” (Exodus 5:2)

While the choice of pronoun alone signals the level of politeness, Japanese also allows for further complexity with the addition of “self-belittling/demeaning” suffixes (*-domo* and *-me*), functioning to humble the speaker (and/or the in-group), signifying one’s “lowly state.” Since these are respectful, self-humbling forms, they are labeled as V/H, as in *chichi* ‘father’ (V/H). These suffixes can attach to pronouns as well as regular nouns as shown below:\(^{30}\)

Table 5: Japanese “belittling/demeaning” suffixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Suffix -domo (TT)</th>
<th>Suffix -me (TT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>watakushi</em> (VV)</td>
<td><em>watakushi-domo</em> (VV-V/H)</td>
<td><em>watakushi-me</em> (VV-V/H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>watashi</em> (V)</td>
<td><em>watashi-domo</em> (V-V/H)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>inu</em> ‘dog’</td>
<td><em>Inu-domo</em> (TT)</td>
<td><em>Inu-me</em> (TT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Japanese Bible, there are few instances of *-domo* suffixes and a number of *-me* suffixes. While the former is found with pronouns, the latter is not used with pronouns. The suffix *-domo* can be found along with the first-person pronoun for a “humbling” purpose (e.g., Genesis 24:23). It is also found with nouns such as ‘servants’ or ‘slaves’ as in “your servants” (e.g., Genesis 42:10):

(21) “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us [*watashi-domo* (V-V/H)] to lodge in your father’s house?” (Genesis 24:23)

(22) “No, my lord, but your servants [*shimobe-domo* (V/H)] have come to buy food” (Genesis 42:10)

\(^{29}\) Perhaps Goliath is simply portrayed as a barbaric warrior, while Pharaoh is more refined as a king.

\(^{30}\) Matsumoto (2001:77) describes *watashi-domo* (V-V/H) as modest, humble, and self-deprecating.
However, this -domo morpheme in the self-humbling sense is only found in the OT. In the NT, -domo appears only in second- or third-person belittling sense, and the vast majority of these occurrences refer to demons (twenty-nine times).\(^{31}\) I have the impression that it communicates the speakers’ or authors’ disgusted attitude towards the demons. However, the usage of these suffixes also faces the issue of consistency. The suffix -domo follows akurei ‘demons’ twenty-nine times in the NT and once in the OT (despite the word akurei ‘demon’ only found twice in the OT). These two occurrences in the OT are contrastive in the usage of -domo despite them having extremely similar constructions:

(23) “They sacrificed to demons [akurei-domo (TTT)] who were not God” (Deuteronomy 32:17).

(24) “They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons [akurei-∅]” (Psalm 106:37).

4.2.3 Second-person address/reference in the Japanese Bible

The Japanese Bible employs four kinds of second-person pronouns. In order of the highest to the lowest register, they are: anata-sama, anata, kimi, and omae, as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-person pronouns</th>
<th>Gender of speaker</th>
<th>Age of speaker</th>
<th>Plural morpheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anata-sama (VV)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>-gata (V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anata (V)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>-tachi (T)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kimi (T)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults/Children</td>
<td>-ra (TT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>omae (TT)</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Adults/Children</td>
<td>-domo (TTT/V/H)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To mark plurality in the second-person pronoun in Japanese, a plural suffix specific for animate objects (including some used only for humans) is attached. The suffixes also have levels of politeness with the four most common being: -gata, -tachi, -ra, and -domo (from highest to lowest register) as shown above.\(^{32}\) The choice of pronouns and plural morphemes reflects the speaker’s desired sociolinguistic meaning; the same can be said about the choice of verbal

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\(^{31}\) The suffix -domo is labeled TTT since it tends to act like a pluralizing morpheme, but there are other pluralizer suffixes -tachi (T) and -ra (TT) within its category. The -me suffix is arguably more demeaning than -domo, but for the purpose of this paper, I kept the labeling equal to -domo.

forms which depends on factors such as the speaker’s gender and his/her relationship and attitude with and towards the listener.  

The Japanese plural pronoun is a combination of two morphemes, a pronoun and a plural morpheme, each reflecting different levels of politeness. While some combinations are natural (with aligned registers), others are ill-formed due to clashes between high and low registers. Perhaps due to a lexical class rule, -domo does not seem to take on any second-person pronoun as shown below:

Table 7: Japanese second-person pronouns and plural morphemes  
(adapted from Matsumoto 2001:77)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-gata</th>
<th>-tachi</th>
<th>-ra</th>
<th>-domo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anata-gata (V-V)</td>
<td>anata-tachi (V-T)</td>
<td>*anata-ra (V-TT)</td>
<td>*anata-domo (V-TTT/V/H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#kimi-gata (T-V)</td>
<td>kimi-tachi (T-T)</td>
<td>kimi-ra (T-TT)</td>
<td>*kimi-domo (T-TTT/V/H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#omae-gata (TT-V)</td>
<td>omae-tachi (TT-T)</td>
<td>omae-ra (TT-TT)</td>
<td>?omae-domo (TT-TTT/V/H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*kisama-gata (TTT-V)</td>
<td>kisama-tachi (TTT-T)</td>
<td>kisama-ra (TTT-TT)</td>
<td>?kisama-domo (TTT-TTT/V/H)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the most common questions that arises with honorifics is, “Would Jesus have spoken to the scribes and Pharisees with respectful forms?” In the Japanese Bible, Jesus usually uses anata ‘2SG (V)’ and anata-gata ‘2PL (V-V)’ when speaking to others, including the crowd/people (e.g., Matthew 15:28; 5:11) and His disciples (e.g., Matthew 17:25; 16:25).

(25) “O woman, your [anata=no ‘2SG (V)=GEN’] faith is great”  
(Matthew 15:28).

(26) “Blessed are you [anata-gata ‘2PL (V-V)’] when people insult you…”  
(Matthew 5:11).

(27) “What do you [anata=no ‘2SG (V)=GEN’] think, Simon?”  
(Matthew 17:25)

33 Matsumoto (2001:77).
34 The question mark (?) is for unnatural forms and the pound (#) for ill-formed. The labels (T and V) are mine. Although Matsumoto (2001) has kisama-tachi (TTT-T) as a well-formed word, it is a questionable combination in modern usage. This intuition is also supported by the fact, according to the labels, the well-formed words are either perfectly aligned or once removed in their registers (with the exception of -domo). However, kisama-tachi (TTT-T) is twice removed in its register difference.
(28) “But who do you yourselves [anata-gata ‘2PL (V-V)’] say that I am?”
(Matthew 16:15)

However, when Jesus is speaking harshly, notably to the religious leaders, He instead uses omae ‘2SG (TT)’ (e.g., Matthew 23:13; 21:13). He also refers harshly to demons as omae (TT) (e.g., Mark 5:9, Luke 8:30):

(29) “But woe to you [∅], scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you [omae-tachi ‘2PL (TT-T)’] shut the kingdom of heaven in front of people”
(Matthew 23:13).

(30) “It is written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer’; but you [omae-tachi ‘2PL (TT-T)’] are making it a den of robbers”
(Matthew 21:13).

(31) “What is your [omae-no ‘2SG (TT)=GEN’] name?” (Mark 5:9)

While religious leaders refer to the blind man as omae (TT) with no respect (e.g., John 9:10), Jesus refers to him as anata (V) which reflects His kind attitude towards him (e.g., John 9:35).

(32) “How then were your [omae-no ‘2SG (TT)=GEN’] eyes opened?”
(John 9:10)

(33) “Do you [anata ‘2SG (V)’] believe in the Son of Man?” (John 9:35)

Can God in the OT or Jesus in the NT be so harsh (or even crude to some extent) even if He is God and Lord of all? Hierarchically speaking, He is definitely not required to pay respect to others, and He does judge and condemn people. However, He is also a loving God who sees people with grace. In which case, should He not still speak caringly (or politely)? This is a difficult decision to make.

While biblical antagonists such as Goliath crudely refer to Israelites as omae-ra (TT-TT) with the lowest register combination possible in the Japanese Bible (e.g., 1 Samuel 17:8), others such as Pharaoh only refer to them as omae-tachi (TT-T) which is less impolite (Exodus 5:4). Similar to the choice of first-person pronouns, these translation decisions make antagonists such as Goliath appear more crude and evil than others including Pharaoh:

(34) “Am I not the Philistine, and you [omae-ra ‘2PL (TT-TT)’] the servants of Saul?” (1 Samuel 17:8)

(35) “Get back to your [omae-tachi=no ‘2PL (TT-T)=GEN’] labors!” (Exodus 5:4)

The serpent deceitfully uses a high register anata-gata (V-V) when tempting Eve (Genesis 3:4). Perhaps this type of deceitful and false politeness can also be seen where religious leaders refer to Jesus and His disciples in public by anata (V) and anata-gata (V-V) (e.g., Matthew 12:38; Luke 5:30):
Honorifics and the Japanese Bible: Goliath is “Ruder” than Pharaoh?

(36) “You [anata-gata (V-V)] certainly will not die!” (Genesis 3:4)
(37) “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You [anata (V)]” (Matthew 12:38)

While demons show respect (or perhaps fear) by referring to Jesus as anata (V), e.g., Luke 4:41, they refer to the Jewish exorcists roughly as omae-tachi (TT-T) in Acts 19:15:

(38) “You [anata (V)] are the Son of God!” (Luke 4:41)
(39) “I recognize Jesus, and I know of Paul, but who are you [omae-tachi (TT-T)]?” (Acts 19:15)

The reason why this section is titled “second-person address/reference” instead of simply “second-person pronouns” is precisely because Japanese often uses non-pronoun expressions in reference to the interlocutor(s). While Father God is referred to as anata (V) throughout the Japanese Bible, this second-person pronoun might perhaps sound unnatural for non-Christian Japanese readers who are not accustomed to the Bible, not only because it is not the highest register on the list, anata-sama (VV), but simply because a pronoun is used in reference to God. There is an unnatural and foreign taste to the presence/usage of the second-person pronoun in reference to God, as Japanese speakers do not usually use second-person pronoun in reference to an important person (or someone the speaker knows by name or has relationship with, such as father or teacher).

Due to various sociolinguistic factors surrounding anata (and pronouns in general), Japanese speakers tend to prefer names over pronouns, and furthermore, titles or relationship terms over names. They do this even if it means repeating them “redundantly.”36 Therefore, in addition to the hierarchy of register within the pronoun, there is a hierarchy of the second-person address/reference: titles/relationship > name > pronoun.

Table 8: “Politeness” hierarchy of second-person address/reference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title / Relationship Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

36 Matsumoto (2001:75) refers to these non-pronoun terms (names, titles, and familial terms) along with second-person pronouns, as the nininshō (=no) hyōgen ‘second-person expression’ (translation mine).
Examples for titles and relationship terms in Japanese are sensei ‘teacher, pastor, doctor, lawyer, politician, artist, etc.’ and o-tō-san ‘father.’ When a child refers to their father as ‘you’ or ‘him’ in Japanese, it has a similar connotation to saying ‘that man’ in English. In other words, using the pronoun is equivalent to saying, “there is no better or more appropriate word to describe our relationship” or “I do not perceive you/him to be my father.” Therefore, even if it may seem redundant to non-Japanese speakers, Japanese children would say, “Dad, are these dad’s glasses?” instead of “Dad, are these your glasses?”

Following the familial term > pronoun rule, in the ’17 version, Jacob’s address to his father Isaac (Genesis 27:19) is appropriately translated as o-tō-san, “replacing” the pronoun anata found in the older versions. In fact, Kyōdōyaku always had this verse translated as o-tō-san ‘father (T)’ since the ’87 version.

(40) “I have done as you [anata ‘2SG (V)’] told me.” (Genesis 27:19 ['78/'03])
(41) “I have done as you [o-tō-san ‘father (T)’] told me.” (Genesis 27:19 ['17])

Based on the sociolinguistic features of Japanese, it may be more natural and appropriate if the biblical characters refer to God consistently as kami-sama ‘God (V)’ (at least within conversational discourse) and make use of pro-drop whenever possible (another polite “technique”).

4.2.4 Third-person address/reference

Just as in the second-person reference, titles/relationship terms and names take priority over pronouns. Additionally, Japanese favors the demonstrative construction as in ‘this/that person’ over the “pure” third-person pronoun, making the following hierarchy: title/relationship > name > demonstrative > pronoun. The table below lists different terms of third-person reference employed in the Japanese Bible from the highest to the lowest register:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third-person reference</th>
<th>Rough translation/example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title/Relationship</td>
<td>Teacher, father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Mr. Theophilus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kono/ano o-kata</td>
<td>‘this/that person/one’ (VV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kono/ano kata</td>
<td>‘this/that person/one’ (V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kono/ano hito</td>
<td>‘this/that person/one’ (T)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kare/kanojo</td>
<td>‘3MS/3FS’ (T)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koitsu/aitsu</td>
<td>‘this/that person/one’ (TT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from this table, the actual third-person pronouns kare and kanojo are the “rudest” of all within the third-person reference hierarchy (with
the exception of the “derogatory” koitsu/aitsu ‘this/that person’ (TT)). This means that when the referent is to be respected, pronouns are avoided in Japanese conversational discourse whenever possible, as they are on the lowest end of the honorific spectrum. Therefore, when the referent is God, the pronoun is often replaced either by a title/relationship term (e.g., kami ‘God’), a proper name (e.g., Iesu ‘Jesus’), or a demonstrative construction (e.g., kono kata ‘this person/one (V)’):

(42) “We also will serve the LORD, for He [kono o-kata ‘this person/one (VV)’] is our God” (Joshua 24:18).

Very intriguingly, Jesus employs these respectful replacements in reference to the Father God and the Holy Spirit:

(43) “But I will warn you whom [kata (V)] to fear: fear the One who [kata (V)], after He [∅] has killed someone, has the power to throw that person into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him [kono kata ‘this person/one (V)’]!” (Luke 12:5)

(44) “the Helper [kono kata ‘this person/one (V)’] is the Spirit of truth, whom [∅] the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him [kono kata ‘this person/one (V)’] or know Him; but you know Him [kono kata ‘this person/one (V)’] because He [kono kata ‘this person/one (V)’] remains with you and will be in you” (John 14:17)

In the Japanese Bible, the narrators of the Gospels consistently use third-person pronouns in reference to every character but show clear deliberate avoidance of this reference for Jesus. They consistently avoid using kare ‘3MS’ (T) by repeating the proper name Iesu. For instance, Luke 24:41–43 reads:

(45) “[He] said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and [He] took it and ate it before them.” ([NASB: the square brackets are mine])

Actually, in Greek, there are four lexical and grammatical references to Jesus in this passage, one by a pronoun and three by verbal subject agreement: εἶπεν ‘(He) said,’ αὐτῷ ‘Him,’ λαβὼν ‘(He) took,’ and ἐφαγεν ‘(He) ate.’ Notice that in the Greek, there is only one overt pronoun ‘Him’ and the rest are third-person subject agreements on verbs. However, since English grammar often requires an overt subject, two pronouns (‘He’) are added. While the English translation added two pronouns, the Japanese translation added the proper name Iesu ‘Jesus’ twice as an overt subject and pro-dropped the original overt pronoun:

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37 The italics in NASB here indicate that the pronoun ‘Him’ is supplied in its translation.
(46) “He [Iesu] said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him [∅] a piece of a broiled fish; and He [Iesu] took it and ate it before them” (Luke 24:41–43 ['17]).

4.3 Verbal honorifics

Japanese verbal honorifics can be marked lexically, morphologically, and grammatically, and the politeness can be achieved differently depending on the type of honorifics employed in a similar manner to familial terms, e.g., chichi (V) when “humbling” one’s father before others vs. otō-sama (V) when “exalting” one’s father or usually someone else’s father.

4.3.1 Five verbal registers and three verbal honorifics

As for the verbal honorifics, Japanese has five major registers: Jō-go, Teinei-go, Sonkei-go, Kenjō-go, and (for the lack of a better word) the “basic” form. They can combine to produce a mixed verb phrase, as shown in the table below with the verb ‘to eat.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registers</th>
<th>Jō-go</th>
<th>Teinei-go (V)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Basic” (T)</td>
<td>taber-u (T)</td>
<td>tabe-masu (T-V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonkei-go (VV)</td>
<td>meshi-agar-u (VV)</td>
<td>meshi-agar-masu (VV-V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenjō-go</td>
<td>itadak-u (VV-H)</td>
<td>itadaki-masu (VV-V/H)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the labels, Teinei-go, Sonkei-go, and Kenjō-go are, strictly speaking, the actual honorific forms (but not Jō-go or the basic form). Sonkei-go and Kenjō-go are both labeled with double V in the table above, as these lexical honorific forms are higher in register than the other morphological or grammatical honorific forms (more on this later). Additionally, the “humble” Kenjō-go is given the label H along with VV to distinguish it from other forms.

Simply put, while Teinei-go is the form with morphological honorifics (taking the honorific auxiliary -masu or an honorific copula such as desu), Jō-go is the non-Teinei-go form which does not take the honorific auxiliary or the

38 As mentioned earlier, morpheme boundaries are minimally marked so that we can focus on the issue of honorifics. Words can get very confusing if all morpheme boundaries are marked e.g., mesh-i-agar-i-masu-u ‘eat (VV-V).’

honorific copula. While Sonkei-go and Kenjō-go are honorific forms (can be lexical, morphological, or grammatical honorifics), the basic form is, lexically speaking, the non-honorific form (i.e., non-Sonkei/Kenjō-go). For convenience’s sake, the basic Jō-go form will be referred to as Jō-go (T) hereafter. This form can be used in casual speech, as in speaking to family members, peers (specific to same age/year group), and hierarchically lower (usually younger) people.

As for the effect of politeness, Sonkei-go is used to raise (or exalt) the referent (whether a second or third person) to show respect. On the other hand, Kenjō-go lowers (or humbles) oneself to show respect to the interlocutor(s). As mentioned with regard to the desu/masu form, Teinei-go makes each utterance polite (or courteous) to show respect to the interlocutor(s). Thus, the politeness affects different people for each of the polite forms: Sonkei-go pays respect directly to the referent by exalting them, Kenjō-go pays respect indirectly by humbling the speaker, Teinei-go pays respect to the interlocutor(s) by speaking appropriately.

4.3.2 “Exalting” Sonkei-go and “humble” Kenjō-go in the Japanese Bible

The Japanese Bible employs three types of “exalting” Sonkei-go. Although both Types 2 and 3 are labeled as single V, the grammatical Sonkei-go (Type 2) is slightly higher in register:

Table 11: Three types of Sonkei-go (‘to eat’):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registers</th>
<th>Jō-go</th>
<th>Teinei-go (V)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Basic” (T)</td>
<td>taber-u (T)</td>
<td>tabe-masu (T-V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonkei-go 1 (VV)</td>
<td>meshi-agar-u (VV)</td>
<td>meshi-agari-masu (VV-V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonkei-go 2 (V)</td>
<td>o-tabe-ni nar-u (V)</td>
<td>o-tabe=ni nari-masu (V-V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonkei-go 3 (V)</td>
<td>taber-are-ru (V)</td>
<td>taber-are-masu (V-V)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verb mentioned earlier meshi-agaru (VV) fits the Type 1 which is not only lexically contrastive (different stem from the basic verb taberu (T)) but also irregular:

(47) Lexical (Type 1): “and [Jesus] took it and ate [meshi-agat-ta (VVV-T)] it in front of them” (Luke 24:43)

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40 The same register Jō-go can be used in other discourse types such as poetry and academic writings. In these discourse types, they do not carry a casual tone, but rather a formal and proper tone. Although they behave somewhat differently compared to the Jō-go in conversational discourse, for the most part they follow the same pattern.

41 Generally speaking, Teinei-go adds the honorific auxiliary masu for verbs and the honorific copula such as desu for nouns, adjectives, and adverbs (including nominalized verbs).
The non-lexical but grammatical Type 2 Sonkei-go is constructed with the following formula: o/go- + verb stem + =ni naru/suru⁴² (honorific prefix o/go-; =ni ‘DAT'; naru lit., ‘to become’; suru lit., ‘to do’) as can be seen in the following passages:

(48) Grammatical (Type 2): “for today in the city of David there has been born [o-um-are=ni nari-mashi-ta (V-V)] for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11)

As can be seen in Table 11 above, Type 3 Sonkei-go employs the suffix -(r)are, and is slightly lower in formality than its grammatical Type 2 counterpart. This morpheme is fundamentally a passive voice marker, but it can also morphologically function as an honorific suffix. This third type is found often in narration:

(49) “He [Jesus] did not speak [hanas-are-nakat-ta (V-T)] anything to them without a parable.” (Matthew 13:34)

The humble Kenjō-go appears both morphologically and lexically. While the slave spoke to his king humbly by the employment of morphological Kenjō-go in (50), the gentile woman begged Jesus by the usage of lexical Kenjō-go in (51), and Tertius greeted the recipients in the letter to the people of Rome with the combination of morphological and lexical humble honorifics in (52):

(50) Morphological: “Have patience with me and I will repay [o-kaeshi shi-masu (V/H-V)] you everything” (Matthew 18:26).
(51) Lexical: “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed [itadaki-masu (VV-V)] on the children’s crumbs” (Mark 7:28).
(52) Morphological: “I, Tertius, who have written this letter, greet [go-aisatsu mōshi-age-masu (VV/H-V)] you in the Lord” (Romans 16:22).

4.3.3 Benefactive morphemes

Japanese has three types of benefactive morphemes which are crucial in natural and appropriate utterances. These morphologically marked benefactives are crucial in expressing linguistic politeness in Japanese utterances. The three kinds differ in the subject’s role (benefactor vs. beneficiary) and the point of view of the utterance (benefactor vs. beneficiary). Each of them has their own counterpart of Sonkei-go or Kenjō-go as shown in the table below:

Table 12: Benefactive morphemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Benefactor</th>
<th>Benefactor</th>
<th>Beneficiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Point of View</td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
<td>Benefactor</td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit. Translation</td>
<td>‘to give’</td>
<td>‘to give’</td>
<td>‘to receive’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jō-go (T)</td>
<td>kureru (T)</td>
<td>ageru (T)</td>
<td>morau (T)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonkei-go (V)</td>
<td>kudasaru (V)</td>
<td>sashi-ageru (V)</td>
<td>itadaku (V)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first benefactive type is kureru (T) and kudasaru (V) which takes the benefactor as the subject with the utterance from the point of view of the beneficiary. The latter “politer” counterpart can be seen in the utterance of the sick man:

(53) “He who made me well [naoshi-te kudasat-ta ‘cured (for me) (V)’] was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk’” (John 5:11).

This benefactive kudasaru signifies that the sick man acknowledged that he had received favor from Jesus and was grateful. If he had simply said naoshi-ta (‘made me well’) instead, without the beneficiary morpheme, he would have sounded very much ungrateful, matter of fact, and indifferent, as if it was somebody else’s business (despite having been saved by the gracious miracle of Jesus).

While the first benefactive type marked the appreciation of the beneficiary, the second benefactive type, ageru (T) and sashi-ageru (V), mark the benefactor’s good will to do a favor for the beneficiary. It takes the benefactor as the subject and is spoken from the point of view of the benefactor:

(54) “Follow Me, and I will make [=ni shi-te age-yō (T)] you fishers of people” (Matthew 4:19).

The breakdown of this transliteration is as follows: the dative case =ni, the inflected form of suru ‘do’ shi, the te connective, the benefactive morpheme stem ageru, and the hortatory subjunctive (volitive) marker yō. Therefore, in this verse, the benefactive morpheme ageru is reflecting Jesus’ good will to bestow to the fishermen the honorable role of being His disciples. This lower register of the benefactor morpheme ageru is usually employed when the person is hierarchically higher and granting favor to the lower person.

The Kenjō-gō counterpart, sashi-ageru (V), is rare and is only found once in the OT (Song of Solomon 8:2) and four times in the NT (Matthew 3:11; 25:37, 38; Luke 1:3):
(55) “Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink [nom-ase-te sashi-age-ta ‘drink-CAUS-CON BEN-PST (V)’]?” (Matthew 25:37)

The third benefactive type, morau (T) and itadaku (V), adds the sense of ‘be given the benefits from the actor.’ In other words, it expresses gratefulness or thankfulness. This sounds almost identical to the effect of kureru/kudasaru. The key difference is that while kureru/kudasaru has the effect of Sonkei-go (as it literally means ‘to give’), the effect of morau/itadaku is Kenjō-go (as it literally means ‘to receive’). It takes the beneficiary as the subject and is spoken from the point of view of the beneficiary:

(56) “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled [wakai-sase-te itadaki-nasai ‘(gratefully/humbly benefit from being allowed to) be reconciled (V)’] to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The breakdown of this verb phrase is ‘reconcile-CAUS-CON BEN-IMP.’ In this verse, the connotation is that God holds all the power and right to forgive, and thus people are completely under His grace. Paul should avoid saying wakai shi-nasai ‘do reconcile’ (reconcile do-IMP) because people cannot “make” God forgive them. Therefore, it is appropriate that the benefactive itadaku is used here in combination with the causative -sase suffix to mean ‘(gratefully/humbly benefit from being allowed to) be reconciled.’

4.3.4 Imperatives

While the lexical (dictionary entry) forms for English verbs are in the imperative form as in eat, Japanese verbs are in infinitive forms as in taber-u ‘to eat.’ The imperative form of ‘eat’ is taber-o, and it is often extremely crude and thus rude in Japanese to simply use this “pure” imperative form. Setting aside the variations contributed by Sonkei-go, Kenjō-go, Teinei-go and the basic form, there are four types of imperative constructions employed in the Japanese Bible: 1) “Pure” imperative; 2) Nasai imperative; 3) Kudasai imperative; and 4) Yo imperative, as organized in the table below:

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The pure form of the verb often carries a negative image associated with people such as commanders, criminals, delinquents, and mobs (although among peers, especially within boys/men, this form is used rather casually). Notice none of these speakers really belong to a “peaceful” or “harmonious” category. Rather, the connotation of this verb type is one or more of the following: rough, crude, rude, forceful, entitled, malicious, etc.

The Roman centurions in the Japanese Bible would use this form when commanding their men. Notice in (57) that this officer’s commands are in the pure imperative while the following descriptive verbs (‘goes,’ ‘comes,’ and ‘does’) are followed by the *Teinei-go* morpheme *masu*, as the centurion is speaking politely to Jesus:

(57) “For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ’Go [ik-e]!’ and he goes [iki-masu], and to another, ’Come [ko-i]!’ and he comes [ki-masu], and to my slave, ’Do [shir-o] this!’ and he does [shi-masu] it” (Matthew 8:9).

The religious leaders and the hostile criminal on the cross mock Jesus in this form:

(58) “You who [omae (TT)] are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, *save* [sukut-te mir-o] Yourself! If You [omae (TT)] are the Son of God, *come down* [ori-te ko-i] from the cross” (Matthew 27:40).


The riled-up crowd also uses this form as well. The intensity of this heated, hateful utterance is enhanced by the pure imperatives:

(60) “*Away with* [nozok-e ‘remove’] Him, *away with* [nozok-e] Him, *crucify* [jūjika=ni tsuker-o] Him!” (John 19:15)
While evil and malicious images accompany pure imperatives, Jesus also employs this imperative type when He is speaking to Satan (Matthew 4:10; 16:23; Mark 8:33) or demons (Mark 1:25; 5:8; 9:25; Matthew 8:32):

(61) “Go away [Sagar-e], Satan!” (Matthew 4:10)
(62) “Be quiet [damar-e], and come out [de-te ik-e] of him!” (Mark 1:25)

This may reflect the antagonistic relationship between Jesus and evil forces and Jesus’ absolute authority over them (like the centurion over his men). Jesus also uses the pure imperative when His intention is of judgement or curse:

(63) “Take [mot-te] these things away [ik-e] from here; stop making My Father’s house a place of business!” (John 2:16)

Jesus’ default imperative is the “authoritative” nasai imperative. This morpheme marks the modality (specifically, mental attitude) of the speaker. This form is often used when parents/teachers are telling their children/students to do (or not do) something. In both of these relationships, the speakers have authority over the listeners. Therefore, it is appropriate for Jesus to use this imperative type when talking to His disciples (e.g., Matthew 26:26) or teaching the crowd/people (e.g., Matthew 4:17):

(65) “Take, eat [tabe-nasai]; this is My body” (Matthew 26:26).
(66) “Repent [kuiaratame-nasai], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

Unlike the Father God who uses the “pure” imperative, the Holy Spirit, like Jesus, also uses the nasai imperative with the disciples. Angels carrying the message of God also follow this pattern:

(67) “Go [iki-nasai] up and join this chariot” (Acts 8:29).
(68) “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take [mukae-nasai] Mary as your wife” (Matthew 1:20).

The kudasai imperative functions as a request or plea, and therefore it is often translated as ‘please’ in English. Since this is the “politer” imperative form, people with hierarchically lower status use this form addressing people of higher status e.g., the religious leaders to the governor Pilate:

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64 Honorifics and the Japanese Bible: Goliath is “Ruder” than Pharaoh?

(69) “Therefore, give orders [meiji-te kudasai] for the tomb to be made secure until the third day” (Matthew 27:64).

When people come to Jesus, they usually employ kudasai whether they are seeking help, making a request, or simply asking a question:

(70) “Have mercy [awarende kudasai] on us, Son of David!” (Matthew 9:27)
(71) “Tell [o-kikase kudasai] us then, what do You think? Is it permissible to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” (Matthew 22:17)

Naturally, prayers to God follow this construction: “And forgive [oyo-rushi kudasai] us our debts” (Matthew 6:12). The disciples also use kudasai with Jesus, but the father of the demon possessed boy is politer than them with his usage of the honorific o- prefix:

(72) “Save [tasuke-te (T) kudasai] us, Lord; we are perishing!”
    (Matthew 8:25)
(73) “I do believe; help [o-tasuke (V) kudasai] my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24)

While the apostles usually use the authoritative nasai imperative when speaking to the crowd/people, they also use the kudasai form: “Men of Israel, listen [ki-te kudasai] to these words” (Acts 2:22). The distinction between the choice of nasai and kudasai by the disciples is also unclear.

5 Conclusion

Although this is merely a glimpse into the complex world of honorifics, I hope this paper can be a gateway for some readers into this issue, providing ideas of how politeness may manifest in languages with honorific systems. Perhaps these details on honorifics have overwhelmed you, however, I hope you have found richness and beauty in them as well. I truly appreciate what Watts et al. (1998) had to say: “The extinction of varieties of languages and cultures on this globe is a loss not only of historical material but also of our resources for global survival, which depends on maintaining variety as the source of the dynamics of creation.” In this ever-globalizing world, I hope that people will continue to read and appreciate God’s Word in diverse ways.
References


Towards a Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Study of Theological Influence in Bible Translation

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Abstract: Although Bible scholars have generally acknowledged that theology plays an important role in Bible translation, affecting it from beginning to end, no studies have been done to date to offer a systematic, theoretical explanation of this phenomenon, thus leaving this subject a largely unmapped territory for study. As an initial attempt to fill this gap, this paper explores theological influence in Bible translation in terms of its theoretical foundation and seeks to find suitable theoretical concepts from both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies in order to construct a theoretical framework that can be used to sharpen and enrich the study of this phenomenon. The paper first addresses the generally negative or fearful attitude toward the subject and then explores the possibility of applying the theoretical concepts of norms (Toury and Chesterman), narrative (Baker), constraints (Lefevere), “Skopos” (Nord), “contextual frame of reference” (Wendland), and “Bible translation polysystem theory” (Kerr) for developing a theoretically-sound, disciplined, and comprehensive study of theological influence in Bible translation. Convinced that Bible translation is inherently a theological task and it is important to enhance our understanding of the theological nature and dimension of Bible translation for theoretical, pedagogical, and translational purposes, this paper proposes that with these five theoretical frameworks at our disposal, it is possible for the multifaceted theological influence involved in Bible translation to be studied in a more objective and systematic way in order to achieve a greater awareness and understanding of their profound and consequential interrelationships.
1 Introduction

This paper will explore the phenomenon of theological influence in Bible translation in terms of its theoretical foundation, and seeks to find suitable theoretical concepts from both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies\(^1\) to construct a theoretical framework that can be used to sharpen and enrich the study, description, and explanation of this phenomenon. The fundamental conviction of this endeavor is that Bible translation is inherently a theological task, and to enhance our understanding of the theological nature and dimension of Bible translation for theoretical, pedagogical, and translational purposes, a suitable systematic framework must be developed for a theoretically-sound, disciplined, and comprehensive study of theological influence in Bible translation to be achieved.

2 Theoretical foundations of theological influence in Bible translation

Although many Bible scholars have acknowledged that theology plays an important role in Bible translation, affecting it from beginning to end,\(^2\) no studies have been done to date to offer a systematic, theoretical explanation of this phenomenon, let alone to situate such an explanation within the theoretical landscapes of both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies. As a result, there has been no theoretical framework proposed for theological influence in Bible translation to be assessed systematically,\(^3\) thus leaving this subject a largely unmapped territory for study. The lack of a theoretical or even general interest in studying this subject can be partially explained by the predominantly negative or fearful attitude toward it among Bible translation theorists—particularly the fear of broaching issues of theology since it is a controversial and debatable subject among both scholars and

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\(^1\) Wendland (2012) has been using the term “biblical translation studies” in reference to the field of Bible translation in order to alert scholars in the secular field of translation studies that there have been many others doing theoretical and practical work besides Eugene Nida and Ernst-August Gutt.

\(^2\) For example, see the 2002 special issue of The Bible Translator on Translation and Theology. Also see Arichea (1982, 1990); Smalley (1991); Blumczynski (2006). Ogden wrote, “[Bible translation] is a theological task from beginning to end—from interpretation to choice of word or phrase” (2002:316).

\(^3\) Blumczynski proposed using the concept of “over-translation” (2006:49) to describe theological influence in Bible translation, but this is far from being a theoretical framework and is also a problematic description, as will be addressed in this paper.
lay-people alike. In the relatively rare cases when theological influence in Bible translation is recognized by modern Bible translation theorists, it is often perceived “as a significant threat to translation accuracy” (Blumczynski 2006:51) and “is generally disapproved of and criticized, as manifested in the common use of negatively marked terms, such as bias, prejudice, or slant” (Blumczynski 2006:252, emphasis original).

Blumczynski (2006)—so far the most extensive scholarly work devoted to studying theological influence in Bible translation—can be seen as a corrective to this negative attitude by comparing sixty-two modern English Bible translations, showing how all of them are to various degrees influenced by theology, and demonstrating that “Bible translation is necessarily a theological task,” that “no translation of the Bible may be legitimately conceived of as theologically impartial or doctrinally neutral,” and that Bible translation “necessarily becomes an act of translation of the doctrine perceived in the source text rather than the text itself” (252, italics added). Concluding that every Bible translation inevitably has a doctrinal profile shaped by the theological views of its translators, he proposes that “the theological markedness of the respective Bible versions, universal and unavoidable as it is, [should] be appreciated rather than resented” (253). He further suggests that interpretational divergence in translation, if evaluated critically, “may only contribute to a fuller understanding of the message...of the Scripture” (253, emphasis original). However, even though he went to such great lengths to demonstrate the theological nature of Bible translation, paradoxically, he himself still chooses to use the terms interference and over-translation to describe theological influence in Bible translation (45–51). This shows that even to one who is fully convinced of the theological nature of Bible translation, theological influence is still perceived negatively as interference leading to over-translation, as most Bible translation theorists typically do.

As a result of this predominantly negative view of theological influence in Bible translation, statements like the following abound in both scholarly and popular literature on Bible translation: “[R]esponsible translation...aims to avoid any sectarian or theologically biased rendering in either the text or notes, endeavoring to present the text in as impartial a way as possible” (Ogden 2002:313). The problem with this kind of statement is that it is an illusion, for it presupposes the existence of a theologically “non-sectarian,” “unbiased,” “impartial” translation, which simply does not exist, as Blumczynski also notes (2006:252). Just in English alone, there are now over 450 translations of the Bible. Which of these is the non-sectarian and unbiased standard version?

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4 The author owes this insight to Ernst R. Wendland (personal communication, September 23, 2021).
This is not to say that there is no such thing as bias in Bible translation or there are absolutely no standards at all within portions of Christianity regarding how the Bible, at least for the most part, should be translated. There are certainly linguistic standards and norms that generally delimit the acceptable range of possible translations. But within this general acceptable range, even key passages associated with essential Christian doctrines have been translated in many different ways throughout history—though not necessarily altering the essential doctrines. Moreover, even among conservative Christians who adhere to a similar set of traditional doctrines, key Bible passages have also been translated in a variety of ways in the numerous Bible versions they use, as Blumczynski (2006) fully demonstrates. Thus, it is virtually impossible to arrive at a universal agreement among all Christians regarding which Bible translations—even just for one single passage, let alone for the whole Bible—are theologically sectarian and biased, and which ones are not.

This should be no surprise to those familiar with the history of Christianity. For beyond the basic tenets which define Christianity in general, there has always been a wide spectrum of different beliefs held by the numerous branches and communities within Christianity, most if not all of whom have always considered themselves orthodox, i.e., holding the most correct theological doctrines, and would vehemently reject being called sectarian or theologically biased. What is perfectly “orthodox” to one group may seem totally “sectarian” and “biased” to another. Who, then, is to be the judge? According to which tradition—Catholic, Protestant (which branch?), or Eastern Orthodox? How about Christian groups who do not identify themselves with any of these traditions? Thus, for the most part, it is problematic if not misleading to use terms like “sectarian,” “biased,” “interference,” or “over-translation,” for they are neither a helpful nor accurate way of describing Bible translation, except in rare, extreme cases where theologically motivated translations are so baseless and contradictory to the Biblical source text that they are universally rejected by Christians as an illegitimate translation.

However, the problematic statement about Bible translation needing to be theologically non-sectarian or unbiased reflects the deeper presupposition of many theorists who consider it as mainly an inter-lingual and inter-cultural linguistic activity that can and should be free from theological interference and thus be theologically neutral. To ensure theological neutrality, the common modern practice is to entrust Bible translation to theologically diverse committees rather than individuals. But is the Bible translation produced by

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5 But even questions about what these tenets are and how they should be understood cannot be answered easily and have always been fraught with different opinions and controversies.
theologically diversified committees necessarily neutral or impartial? Blumczynski thinks not, as he observed,

> It must be recognized that translation projects undertaken or supervised by theologically diversified committees, in pursuit of broad acceptability may tend to introduce a different kind of theological interference manifested in excessive generality and doctrinal inoffensiveness arrived at by means of a theological consensus at the expense of the fidelity to the source text, as perceived by the individual members of the committee (52, emphasis added).

In other words, a “theologically neutralized” translation may suffer from a different kind of “theological interference” than a theologically non-neutralized translation may. Moreover, a theologically neutralized version also presupposes a universal standard according to which everything can be judged to be either falling on one side or the other or as extreme or not, but who has the right to set up this standard? In any case, the setting up of that standard would be the result of a theological interpretative decision, and therefore such a standard would be as much a theological interpretation and may exert as much theological influence on Bible translation as any other theological interpretation. Although this may sound like the postmodernist view that “there is no pure objectivity” and “everything is tainted by observer’s subjectivity,” the above observation is less to introduce a postmodernist worldview on Bible translation than to simply bring what many Bible translation scholars have already recognized to its logical conclusion: that is, since Bible translation has been recognized by many Bible translation scholars as necessarily a theological task, then, logically, Bible translation can never be free from theological influence. The reason for this is simple: the Bible is a theological text, so translating it necessarily involves theological interpretation (thus, a “theological task”), which depends on the translators’ theological stance (Zogbo 2002:121); therefore, Bible translation will inevitably be influenced by the translators’ stance formed by their theological background and context. Such an understanding of the theological nature of Bible translation can be considered the theoretical foundation for studying theological influence in Bible translation and can be represented by the following premises:

1. Premise 1: Translation necessarily involves interpretation.
2. Premise 2: The Bible is a theological text.

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6 There is no doubt that one’s theological view may be described as “observer’s subjectivity,” for theological view is a highly subjective matter.
Premise 3: Following from premises 1 and 2, Bible translation necessarily involves the interpretation of a theological text, i.e., theological interpretation.

Premise 4: One’s theological interpretation depends on one’s theological stance, which is formed by one’s theological background and context.

Premise 5: Therefore, Bible translation is necessarily influenced by the translators’ theological background and context.

Notice how “background” and “context” are separately defined above, for while theological influence in Bible translation is inevitable because no Bible translation can be done in a theological vacuum, such theological influence may not necessarily come from the translators’ own theological background. For example, it is possible for a Lutheran translator (Lutheran being his or her theological background) to be employed to translate a Bible for a Methodist Bible society or a Methodist church and be required to follow Methodist theological interpretation for this translation project (this being his current theological context). Of course, in this context, the translator may still consciously or unconsciously translate in a way that expresses his or her Lutheran interpretation, but he or she will more likely make a conscious effort to meet the requirements of this project for professional, ethical, and practical reasons, e.g., to avoid problems. In any case, theological influence in Bible translation is inevitable, and as such, it should not be perceived primarily in negative terms because of the problematic presupposition associated with those terms. Now, what would be a more positive and accurate way to describe theological influence in Bible translation? How does the theoretical foundation presented above fit into the theoretical landscapes of both the field of translation studies and Biblical translation studies? Moreover, what can a study focusing on the theological influence on Bible translation contribute to the theoretical developments in both of these fields?

3 Useful theoretical concepts in translation studies

As mentioned earlier, in Blumczynski (2006), the problematic concept of “over-translation” was proposed to describe theological influence in Bible translation. Although defined as including both “over-translation” and “under-translation,” covering “all instances of deviation from the theological content of the source text, either toward greater or lesser specificity” (2006:49), this definition falls prey to the same problem of presupposing the existence of one universal standard of Bible translation, which simply does not exist, at least not in the truly
universal sense. Who then is to determine what constitutes a “deviation” and what “the theological content of the source text” should be? Even the very notion of biblical “source text” itself is a matter of debate, e.g., whether or not to include the Deuterocanonical books, and if so, which ones? Moreover, is there only one legitimate interpretation of that “theological content”? No one can answer these questions in a way that would be accepted by all Christians today. Thus, a more suitable way of describing theological influence in Bible translation still needs to be found. For this, we now turn to a few useful theoretical concepts that have been developed in the field of translation studies.

3.1 Norms

As our aim is to assess theological influence in Bible translation, this enquiry naturally falls into the type of research in the field of translation studies called “descriptive translation studies” (Hermans 2020). It is in this sub-domain of translation studies that we find a useful conceptual tool for our enquiry, called “norms.” The concept of norms in translation studies, first introduced by Toury (1978) to refer to “regularities of translation behavior within a specific sociocultural situation” (Baker 2009:189), is a useful conceptual tool for describing theological influence because just as norms can function as “performance instructions” (Toury 1980:51; 1995:55) or “correctness notions” (Bartsch 1987:xiv; Chesterman 2016:52) to translators, so can theological concepts to Bible translators, informing them as to which way of translation is

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7 Within certain faith communities during certain periods, there may be an “authorized” version that is generally held by those communities as the “standard version” against which all other Bible translations can be evaluated, such as the Vulgate for the Catholic Church or the King James Version for some Protestant churches and communities. But that is far from a universally accepted standard among all Christians.

8 This is clearly not how medieval theologians read the Bible, who commonly speak of the “four senses” of the Scriptures, i.e., how there can be four levels of meaning or interpretation for one Bible passage—literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical.

9 Unlike the Quran, the Bible as a whole never exists as only one unique language version without any translations but always exists in different translations throughout history. Thus, the one who can answer all these questions must be one who possesses the supreme interpretative and translational authority over the Biblical source text for a certain Christian community, during a certain period of time, and over a certain geographical region. But church history shows that there was never a time when the entire realm of Christianity was ruled over by only one supreme interpretative and translational authority, not even during the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed something close to that, for there have always been Christian groups that do not follow the authority of the Catholic Church. See Broadbent (2000).
theologically “correct” or “appropriate.” Moreover, the concept of norm is built on a fundamental premise shared by the present research: that is, translating is a decision-making process involving interpretative decisions, and between the two extreme poles of translational decisions that are fully predetermined (constrained by structural differences between languages), and totally idiosyncratic (wholly gratuitous one-off choices), norms function to explain why translators tend to make certain decisions rather than others (73–74).

Thus, the premise of the concept of norms matches very well the premise of this study on the theological influence in Bible translation: that is, Bible translation is a decision-making process which involves many theological decisions in interpreting the Biblical text, and between the two extreme poles of translation decisions (fully predetermined or totally idiosyncratic), certain theological norms coming from both the translators’ theological background and context as defined above may function to explain why they tend to make certain decisions. As Hermans suggests, the process of decision-making in translation “is in large measure, necessarily and beneficially, governed by norms,” or else the translators faced with a source text “would either be unable to opt for one solution rather than another and throw up their hands in despair, or make entirely random decisions, like a computer gone haywire” (1996:28). The same can be said about Bible translation: without some kind of theological norms governing Bible translators’ interpretative decisions, they would either be unable to make any interpretative decisions or would be making entirely random interpretative decisions. This shows how the concept of norms in translation studies provides a useful conceptual tool for describing theological influence in Bible translation, without the problematic presuppositions associated with terms like “sectarian,” “biased,” “neutral,” “interference,” and “over-translation,” as seen earlier.

While there is still no agreed upon definition of norms in translation studies (Zwischenberger 2020:375), many definitions that have been assigned to this term are clearly applicable to studying the influence of theology in Bible translation. For example, Toury (1995) distinguishes three types of norms: preliminary, initial, and operational norms. In the case of Bible translation, preliminary norms, which determine the choice of texts to be translated, correspond to the selection of Greek or Hebrew texts as textual basis, the application of textual criticism in choosing among textual variants, and one’s overall motive in Bible translation, i.e., why one chooses to translate the Bible. Initial norms, which determine whether a translation is oriented toward the norms of the source or target cultures, correspond to the extent one leans toward the dynamic/functional equivalent approach or the more traditional, essentially literal approach in Bible translation, the two main approaches in Bible translation (Ryken 2009; Grudem et al. 2005). Operational norms, which influence
the concrete choices during the translation process, correspond to all translational choices made during Bible translation. All these three categories of norms—preliminary, initial, and operational—in Bible translation are bound to be influenced by theology.

For example, regarding preliminary norms, a certain theological conviction may cause one to favor Textus Receptus over the Nestle-Aland text, whether in part or in whole. The “King James Only” advocates, many of whom believe that God has supernaturally preserved the Textus Receptus to be an inerrant text—a theological belief—is a case in point (White 2009). Those who do not hold such a belief may prefer the Nestle-Aland text, and such a choice may also be informed to some degree by the theological belief that God did not supernaturally preserve the Textus Receptus, but has allowed the development of textual criticism after hundreds of years to arrive at a text that is closer to the original. This illustrates that either one prefers Textus Receptus or the Nestle-Aland text, certain theological belief is at play.

Regarding initial norms, one’s preference for the dynamic/functional equivalent approach or a more literal approach in Bible translation is also inevitably informed by theology, as the chosen degrees of literalness, contextualization, inculturation, or indigenization for Bible translation in part or in whole all depend on one’s theological belief and interpretation regarding the message and the manner of communication intended by the divine Author. Regarding operational norms which cover all translational choices during Bible translation, the inevitability of theological influence has been discussed in the previous section and demonstrated by Blumczynski’s work and others.¹⁰ Thus, Toury’s threefold typology of norms can serve as a helpful theoretical framework for examining and describing the various ways that theological concepts as norms may influence Bible translation.

Chesterman’s categorization of norms into expectancy norms and professional norms (1997; 2016:62–68) is also applicable and provides an even more detailed theoretical framework for studying theological influence in Bible translation. First, according to Chesterman, expectancy norms are product norms, which are the readers’ expectations of what a translation should be, and in the case of Bible translation, the readers’ expectations of how Bible translation should be closely related to and informed by their theological concepts or convictions. For example, whether God should speak like a Californian teenager or an ancient king is not only a linguistic and cultural question but also a theological question. The readers’ expectation of how the Bible and especially certain passages should be translated is most likely shaped by their church affiliation and theological background. A Catholic, for instance, would most likely

¹⁰ See note 2.
expect to receive a Bible translation that follows the tradition of Catholic Bible translation, and a Protestant, the tradition of Protestant Bible translation, and so on.

Second, professional norms are process norms set by the professionals that regulate the translation process itself. In the field of Bible translation, these may include Bible translation scholars, Biblical language scholars, professional Bible translators/organizations, theologians, and church leaders. Each Bible translation project usually has its own set of professional standards, most likely decided upon by the initiators and sponsors of those projects. Chesterman’s professional norms can be further subdivided into accountability, communication, and relation norms (2016:65–68), all of which also have a theological dimension.

First, for the accountability norms, which are the ethical norms concerning professional standards of integrity and thoroughness, the idea of integrity and thoroughness in Bible translation is closely related to theological tradition: what counts as integrity and thoroughness in Bible translation in one theological tradition may not be the same in another. Therefore, it is the theological tradition of what a certain Biblical text means which determines if its translation has been done with integrity and thoroughness. Accountability norms also describe the theological influences that a certain Bible society, Christian organization, or church may exert on Bible translators. Bible translators are often translating the Bible for these entities, to whom they are accountable, and thus they must meet their standards of integrity and thoroughness.

Second, for the communication norm, which is a social norm specifying the translator’s role as a communication expert, the idea of “optimal communication” in Bible translation is again shaped by theological conviction: how the Bible should be best communicated is a theological question understood very differently among different Christian traditions and between the advocates of dynamic/functional equivalent translation and those of essentially literal translation. Eastern Orthodoxy’s theological view of the Bible as icons (Crisp 2002), according to which clarity and understandability is not emphasized in Bible translation, illustrates how a theological view may serve as a “communication norm” dictating how the Bible is supposed to be communicated.

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11 For example, the Catholic Church for a very long time (especially during the Middle Ages) did not believe that the Bible could be properly communicated to people through translations, and thus for many centuries translation of the Bible was banned. Generally speaking, there is still a great difference today in the theological understandings between Catholics and Protestants as to whether the Bible can be properly communicated to the common people without the interpretative guidance of ecclesiastical authorities and traditions.
Third, for the relation norm, the linguistic norm that determines what counts as an appropriate relation of relevant similarity between the source and target texts is also closely related to theological interpretation. Although linguistic norms (lexical norms, grammatical norms, syntactical norms, literary norms, etc.) may appear to be unrelated to theology, ultimately, it is often the theological interpretation of what the source text means that determines how all the linguistic elements of the source text should be translated into the target language, i.e., what counts as “an appropriate relation of relevant similarity” between the source and target texts.

Norms have been described as standing between the two poles of absolute idiosyncrasies and absolute rules (Toury 1995:54) or between judicial laws and conventions (Chesterman 2016:53). Applying to Bible translation, theological influence described as norms in Bible translation also vary in terms of their importance and binding force upon the translators. This provides another analytical lens through which theological influence can be assessed.

According to Chesterman, norms also function to promote values and the ideologies related to them (1999; Zwischenberger 2020:378). Theological norms in Bible translation also function to promote certain theological interpretations and traditions. For example, the theological norms of English Bible translation in translating ποιμένας (poimenas) in Ephesians 4:11 as “pastors” instead of “shepherds” and translating ἐπισκόποις (episkopoi) in Philippians 1:1 and Acts 20:28 as “bishops” instead of “overseers,” are clearly related to the promotion of the systems of pastors and bishops in certain Christian ecclesiastical traditions, which systems, however, are not accepted by other Christian traditions. This demonstrates how theological norms can very much act as the driving force behind certain theological concepts or traditions through Bible translation.

Furthermore, Chesterman’s observation (2016:170–171) that norms are governed by value and embody or tend toward a certain value also provides useful insights for studying theological influence in Bible translation. Theological norms definitely embody certain values, and the most prominent or even ultimate value governing or embodied in theological norms probably is the belief that what the theological norms convey is “true according to God” or “faithful according to what God wants to say.” At least among believers, theological concepts are usually presented and promoted because their presenters or promoters believe that these concepts are true or faithful according to God. This insight sheds further light on how theology may influence Bible translation: Bible translators—at least those who are Christians—would most likely translate a
passage in a way that they believed to be in line with God’s intention,\textsuperscript{12} except in rare cases where Bible translation is done under coercion or done by non-Christians or non-religionists for non-Christian or non-religious purposes where the question of God is out of the picture. For Bible translators, most of whom regard translating the Bible as an act of serving God, this “value” of “being true according to God” or “faithful according to what God wants to say” may be considered the ultimate value that transcends all other values, or the ultimate norm that transcends all other norms. This shows the supremacy of theological norms over other kinds of norms in Bible translation and hence the importance of studying them.

From the above discussion, the usefulness of the concept of norms to studying theological influence in Bible translation should be apparent, for just as no translation is done in a vacuum (Lefevere 1992; Levý 2000), no Bible translation is done in a vacuum—particularly a theological vacuum—as Bible translation necessarily requires theological interpretation (exegesis) which in turn depends on the theological stance of the translator (Zogbo 2002:121). Therefore, Bible translation is bound to be governed by its translators’ theological stance, theological background, and theological context, all of which may give rise to certain theological norms. Thus, norm is a useful conceptual tool in analyzing and describing theological influence in Bible translation, and Toury’s model of preliminary, initial, and operational norms, coupled with Chesterman’s model of expectancy (product) norm and professional (process) norm with its further division into accountability (ethical), communication (social), and relation (linguistic) norms, provide a well-structured theoretical framework by which theological influence in Bible translation can be studied and explained. The importance of such a study to both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies can be seen from Herman’s observation (1996:39):

One of the major tasks of the researcher wishing to account for translation as a social practice consists in identifying and interpreting the norms which governed the translator’s choices and decisions. The task extends to accounting, in given communities, at certain times or over a period of time, for the system of norms governing particular

\textsuperscript{12} This involves the complex theological issue of “inspiration,” i.e., does God really speak through the Scriptures, and in what sense and to what extent? While Bible translators do not all believe that the entire Scriptures are inspired by God and do not all understand “inspiration” in the same way, they all translate the Bible in a way that they believe to be ultimately according to what God wants, i.e., not knowingly contradicting God, unless they subscribe to an anti-God ideology.
domains of translation and the discursive models which inspired the norms.

This is how a study on theological influence in Bible translation may fit in and contribute to both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies. It is a descriptive study that aims to identify and interpret the theological norms that governed translators’ choices and decisions in a certain Bible translation project and extends to account for the larger systems of theological norms governing Bible translation and the discursive models which inspired those norms in a particular context. As Chesterman proposes that translation theory should be (among other things) a normative discipline whose object is “the description, understanding, and explanation of translation norms” (2016:51), the aim of studying theological influence in Bible translation is to describe, understand, and explain the theological translation norms operating in a given Bible translation project. Moreover, both Toury and Chesterman agree that one reason for studying translations is “to discover the concept of ‘equivalence’ or ‘relevant similarity’ held by a particular translator or a particular culture at a given time, for a given kind of text. etc.,” for “the boundaries of the concept ‘translation’ are ultimately not set by something intrinsic to the concept itself, but by the ways in which members of a culture use the concept” (60). Thus, a study on the theological influence in Bible translation may contribute to both translation studies and Biblical translation studies by discovering how theology, in a certain context (people, time, place, and text), may give rise to norms that shape the concepts of “equivalence,” “relevant similarity,” and “translation” for the translation of the Bible. This kind of research should also offer a fresh insight on how Bible translation is evaluated, for as Hermans (2010:147) noted, “to understand and speak about someone else’s translation, we must translate that translation.” In other words, we need to know why a translator has made certain decisions before we can reasonably assess the results of these decisions (Chesterman 2016:133–134). Thus, a further possible contribution this kind of study may bring to the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies is to highlight the norm-governed nature of translation and demonstrate that Bible translation cannot be understood and evaluated fairly apart from its norms, especially theological ones.

However, when primarily understood as socially constructed constraints on human behavior (Schäffner 1999), norms are inadequate to fully describe the phenomenon of theological influence in Bible translation. This is because the theological concepts of the translators are much closer to personal beliefs and convictions than social constraints. Theological beliefs are not just some kind of external customs and rules constructed by a society and passed down by practice or authorities for individuals to follow, although they certainly can be and have
been that way also, e.g., during the Middle Ages where many Europeans’ theological beliefs were simply handed down to them by the Catholic Church as customs or rules to follow. But at least in Protestant Christianity, where religious freedom and the exercise of a person’s free will are more highly valued and emphasized, theological beliefs are more often strong personal convictions freely exercised by individual believers, especially those who are religiously devoted enough to become Bible translators. William Tyndale would be a prime example of this, who ultimately died for his theological convictions in translating the Bible. This is especially so in the cases of Bible translations done by missionaries. For missionaries normally decide voluntarily to become missionaries to a foreign land, driven by strong theological beliefs. As such, especially in their Bible translation activities, they were not simply following some kind of norm as sociological behavioral custom or rule so that they can fit in certain social context. Rather, their activities were solely motivated by strong personal beliefs of what God has spoken, revealed to them, or motivated them to do. Thus, although the concept of norms is a helpful tool in describing theological influences on translation in translation studies terms, it cannot accurately describe the character and nature of theological beliefs of the translators in most cases of Bible translation. Therefore, a better term or concept to describe theological influence would be the influence of belief or conviction, neither of which, however, have been fully studied and developed as a theoretical concept in translation studies. The closest (albeit also not fully adequate) terms and concepts that have been proposed and developed in the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies are, respectively, “narrative” and “cognitive frame of reference,” which will be discussed below.

3.2 Narrative

The concept of narrative or the socio-narrative theory is expounded most extensively in the field of translation studies by Baker (2020:356–361; 2006). Broadly defined as “an account of connected events occurring in space and over time” (2020:356) or “a story with a perceived beginning and a projected end” (2018:179), the term “narrative” is applicable to theology particularly when it is used as a sociological term, as “the principal mode by which we experience the

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13 However, in rare cases, it is possible for Bible translators to be forced to adopt a theological position contrary to their own in translating the Bible in a certain way, such as the illustration given earlier about a Lutheran employed to translate the Bible for a Methodist Bible Society.

14 Baker (2006) remains the most detailed exposition of this concept in the field of translation studies to date (2018:179). Also see Jones (2020).
world” (2018:180), or as “the primary means by which we make sense of the world around us” (2020:357; Somers and Gibson 1994:58). In this sociological sense, a narrative is akin to theology, for theology can also be seen as a grand narrative, that is, a story about God and his creation, through which one can make sense of the world. Baker actually cites Christianity and other world religions as examples of “meta-narratives,” which she defines as “particularly potent public narratives that persist over long periods of time and influence the lives of people across a wide range of settings” (2018:185; 2010:351).

Baker’s understanding here is remarkably similar to what is called narrative theology (also known as postliberal theology), the theological movement started by Hans Frei and George Lindbeck in the 1980s, which similarly considers theology as a grand narrative instead of a system of propositions, thus demonstrating the affinity between theology and narrative.15 There are at least two ways this concept of narrative is useful to studying theological influence in Bible translation. First, this sociological understanding of narrative, especially on the level of what Baker called meta-narrative, is very close to the term “worldview,” which can be defined as “a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint”16 or “a set of fundamental beliefs, values, etc., determining or constituting a comprehensive outlook on the world; a perspective on life.”17 In this sense, both “narrative” and “worldview” are the “story” which people believe to be true and through which they understand the world. Thus, theology has also often been described as a worldview,18 for theology by definition offers people a view on God and his relationship with the world, through which man may make sense of the world and his own existence in it. Thus, theology, taken in this sense, can certainly be considered as a worldview, and conversely, every worldview, if it is to account for the world, must also have a theological dimension, i.e., saying something about God, including saying that God does not exist or that the question about

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15 For an introduction to narrative theology, see Hauerwas and Jones (1997).
18 For example, Randy Alcorn wrote: “Though worldview and theology can be distinguished from each other in secondary ways, in the primary sense, I think they are not only inseparable, but practically synonymous... ‘Worldview’ is a modern word, but it is not a modern concept. It used to be called doctrine or theology. One looked at the world through the lenses of one’s theology, and that was his worldview...In my mind, theology is the foundation upon which worldview is built.” https://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Feb/9/what-relationship-between-theology-and-worldview/, accessed March 30, 2022.
God is unknowable.\(^{19}\) This insight shows that theology and meta-narrative as a kind of worldview are simply inseparable. In this light, if we apply Baker’s socio-narrative theory, particularly the idea that every translator is inevitably part of a narrative—whether consciously or unconsciously (Baker 2005:11–12)\(^{20}\)—then it follows that every translator is also inevitably part of a meta-narrative with a theological dimension. In other words, if Baker is correct that no one is without a narrative, then no one is without a theology through which one may answer any question about God—which is actually a common view shared by theologians. This shows how the concept of narrative may illuminate the intersection between theology and translation and can be a useful concept to describe and explain theological influence in Bible translation. For example, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or Eastern Orthodox theology can all be understood as different kinds of meta-narratives and studied to see how out of the influences of these meta-narratives Bible translations were produced differently.

Another way that the concept of narrative can be helpful to studying theological influence in Bible translation is in the typology of narratives as defined by Baker in her works (2015; 2006). According to Baker, narratives can be divided into four categories: besides meta-narratives, there are also personal, public, and disciplinary narratives. Personal narratives are “narratives of individuals, who are normally located at the centre of narration”; public narratives are “elaborated by and circulate among social and institutional formations larger than the individual”; and disciplinary narratives “have at their centre the object of enquiry in a scholarly field” (2010:350–351). Boéri (2008:26) introduced an additional category, professional narratives, to cover “stories and explanations that professionals elaborate for themselves and others about the nature and ethos of their activity.”

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\(^{19}\) As Freddy Davis wrote: “[E]very worldview has some understanding about God—even if it is to deny his existence. And make no mistake, denying the existence of God is as much a faith statement as advocating for his existence. Thus, every worldview has a theological point of view. Understanding the place of theology is a critical piece in understanding any belief system.” http://www.marketfaith.org/worldview-and-theology/ (accessed March 30, 2022).

\(^{20}\) Baker (2005:11–12) wrote, “A narrative view helps us understand that people’s behavior is ultimately guided by the stories they believe about the events in which they are embedded...Moreover, narrative theory does not allow for ‘space in between’: no one, translators included, can stand outside or between narratives.” Elsewhere she wrote, “Just as a culture-less or context-free entity or event is impossible to envision, so an element that is not configured in narrative form is by (my) definition of narrative unimaginable and/or incomprehensible to the human mind” (Baker and Chesterman 2008:24).
All these five types of narratives can be applied to theology, for it can equally be said that there is personal theology as one’s own account of his or her own relationship or “story” with God; public theology as a social and institutional entity’s own account of its own relationship or story with God; disciplinary theology as theology taught and studied in academia; meta theology as a grand theological narrative about God’s plan for the whole universe; and professional theology as the theology that professional theologians and clergymen develop for themselves and others to explain about the nature, ethos, importance, and purpose of their activities. In short, theology can be divided into and found on all five levels, and these different levels of theologies can all be studied to see how they interact and influence Bible translation. This provides a useful theoretical framework for describing theological influence in Bible translation and also shows how complex and ubiquitous theological influence could be in shaping Bible translation.

3.3 Constraints and Skopos theory

Andrew Lefevere’s model of describing translation as rewriting under the constraints of patronage, ideology, poetics, universe of discourse, and language (Lefevere 1992) also provides a useful framework for analyzing theological influence: patronage corresponding to the particular sponsors with their own theological traditions that support Bible translation activities, ideology corresponding to the theology of the translators and other stakeholders, poetics (similar to norms) corresponding to the customs or traditions of how Bible translation should be in a certain historical context, and the universe of discourse corresponding to the larger context of the entire fields of Bible translation and theology at a certain time and place. These concepts may serve as supplementary conceptual tools for describing theological influence in Bible translation. Lefevere’s insight that “on every level of the translation process it can be shown that if linguistic considerations conflict with considerations of an ideological and/or poetiological nature, the latter considerations tend to win” corresponds to and confirms the idea that theological norms tend to prevail over other kinds of norms, because they embody the ultimate value of being “true according to God” as discussed above, which to Bible translators and their patrons are usually the most important value above all.

Skopos theory (Reiß and Vermeer 2014; Nord 2018), where skopos is defined as “purpose” in translational activity, may also be applied at least in two ways to the study of theological influence in Bible translation. First, despite the criticism the theory has received, i.e., for lacking empirical support and testable hypotheses (Chesterman 2017; Martín de León 2020:201), it nevertheless points to the goal-oriented or functional nature of Bible translation, showing that no
Bible translation is done without a certain goal or function in view which guides the entire translation process. Since the ultimate goal of most Bible translations is inherently theological, i.e., to convey the Word of God to a certain readership, the theological backgrounds and context of those who get to decide any other sub-goals of a Bible translation will inevitably influence how these other goals are formulated, negotiated, and executed in relation to the ultimate goal. For example, the conviction that there should or should not be different Bible versions for different age groups, social groups, or gender groups is underpinned by a certain theological view. As the goals for Bible translation projects are often manifold and even conflicting (Wilt 2014:59–66; Wilt and Wendland 2008:178–189), a study of the theological considerations and presuppositions behind the formulation, negotiation, and execution of all the goals in a Bible translation project will certainly be illuminating.

Second, the “skopos rule” in Skopos theory states that “translational action is a function of its skopos” (Martín de León 2020:200), or “the skopos is the highest determining factor influencing the translator’s decisions” (Chesterman 2017:56). Even if this “skopos rule” is only partially true, it still serves to show the paramount importance of studying theological influence in Bible translation because what the skopos or function of the Bible should be, as discussed above, is inherently a theological question, and consequently, theological considerations and presuppositions which contribute to the answering of that question may prove to be the highest determining factor influencing the translator’s decisions.

4 Useful theoretical concepts in Biblical translation studies

Two other useful theoretical concepts are found in the field of Biblical translation studies, namely, the concept of “contextual frame of reference” developed by Wendland (2008), and the Bible translation polysystem theory proposed by Kerr (2013).

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21 Even if a person is to translate the Bible just for himself and not for anyone else, that intention is still a goal or skopos which will influence how that entire translational activity is carried out.

22 It should be noted that determining the primary skopos is just part of a project’s overall brief, or job commission, but the rest of the brief is certainly under the influence of the primary skopos or sets of skopoi.
4.1 Contextual frame of reference

In Wendland’s theoretical framework, a contextual “frame of reference” is defined as “a particular perspective from which the universe is observed” (2008:2), “a psychological construct, or mental model, which furnishes one with prevailing point of view that manipulates prominence and relevance to influence thinking and, if need be, judgement as well” (2010:28). A frame may also be viewed as “a cognitive schema involving a grouping, or file, of interrelated signs (in a semiotic sense) that guides a strategy of perception and interpretation which people rely on to understand and respond to the world around them” (28).

For our purpose here, it suffices to point out that the usefulness of Wendland’s model is in its division of the very broad idea of contextual frame of reference into layers of subordinate frames, from the most inclusive and generic (“outer”) one to the less inclusive and more specific and concrete ones, that is, from cognitive frames to sociocultural frames, organizational frames, situational frames, and textual frames (which is further divided into intertextual and intratextual frames). As in the case of “narrative” where theology can be categorized according to all five levels of narrative (i.e., meta, public, disciplinary, professional, and personal narrative/theology), so can theology be categorized according to these different layers of frame—as theology with respect to the cognitive, sociocultural, organizational, situational, and textual and intratextual layers. Among them, cognitive frames is the most general and inclusive frame encompassing all other sub-frames just mentioned. It is commonly termed “worldview” as “an individual or a corporate conception of knowledge, being, and existence—in short, all of ‘reality’” (2008:19). As such, the cognitive frame of reference corresponds to Baker’s idea of meta-narrative and to theology as a kind of meta-narrative, and can serve as a useful conceptual tool to describe how theological beliefs within a particular culture, whether Christian or non-Christian, may function as a cognitive frame of reference which encompasses and influences all other sub-frames—the sociocultural, organizational, situational, and textual frames. In Wendland’s usage, sociocultural frames mainly refer to the constraint of particular socio-cultural customs or traditions; organizational frames, to the rights and responsibility of allegiance to the specific organizations within a society, including church bodies and denominations; situational frames, to the circumstances in which different acts of religious or secular communication takes place; textual frames, to the pervasive influence of biblical intertextuality and an individual text’s internal frame of reference (2008). Like the different narratives, all these different mental frames of reference provide a useful theoretical framework for theological influence in Bible translation to be explored and described in different cognitive layers as distinct contextual dimensions (2).
4.2 Bible translation polysystem theory

Applying the polysystem translation theory by Itamar Even-Zohar and Toury, Kerr proposed a “Bible translation polysystem theory,” which he considered as “a more holistic approach to describe the entire picture of Bible translation and how individual changes in a translation process may affect other parts” (Kerr 2013:1). His theoretical model is based on the premise that “Bible translation is the end result of the specific combination of systems and sub-systems used to produce it” (18); thus, his model is “a mapping of Bible translation polysystems, defining them into broad categories of input systems (training and guidance systems) and output systems (communication and distribution systems)” (1), as represented by the following diagram from Kerr (2013:7):
The usefulness of this model and diagram to studying theological influence in Bible translation is that it lays out almost the entire process of Bible translation and allows us to easily identify where theological influence may have played a role in it. One limitation of this diagram is that it leaves out theological
education and training within the “Training systems”23 and also does not explicitly spell out any theological factors in the entire output systems. However, these aspects could have been mentioned in the “background issues” and “interpretive issues” under “Relevance systems” and also with reference to theological backgrounds of the target readers, which is not even listed. Nevertheless, this diagram does show that theology plays a major role in the input systems, particularly in the “Guidance systems” where interpretative and translational decisions are made and are influenced by “Biblical interpretation” including “theological systems.” “Organizational guidance” particularly from Bible societies and churches are most likely under the influence of the theological traditions associated with those organizations. The theological traditions from which the consultants and study materials come will likely also influence the translation process. While more detailed items can be added to this diagram with theological factors spelled out more clearly, this diagram and the Bible translation polysystem theory proposed by Kerr provides yet another useful theoretical framework for studying theological influence in Bible translation. Particularly, combining his theory (which deals more with the extrinsic, outward structures or systems associated with Bible translation) with Wendland’s frame of reference model (which deals more with the intrinsic, inward mental construct) will likely yield a very comprehensive picture of the entire process of Bible translation, where theological influences can be systematically located and studied. If Bible translation is a cube, Kerr's model could be said to have mapped out nearly all the surfaces of this cube (all the possible areas involved in Bible translation), while Wendland’s model could be said to have provided an “X-ray view” that looks inside this cube, to reveal the multiple layers of cognitive frames in each area. Thus, in the four areas that Kerr identified (the training systems, guidance systems, communication systems, and distribution systems), the different layers of cognitive frames that Wendland listed could all be examined, and this methodology should help the researchers, on the one hand, identify the areas and cognitive layers to look for theological influences (for theological influences may operate in all of them) and, on the other hand, avoid losing sight of the breadth and depth of non-theological influences (which may also operate in all these areas and cognitive layers), to attain a fuller understanding of the complex dynamics of both theological and non-theological influences that shape a Bible translation.

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23 Kerr (personal correspondence) agrees that theological education and training might be included within the “Training systems.”
5 Summary

This article points out that theological influence in Bible translation has been mostly perceived negatively by Bible translation scholars, and this negative attitude might partly explain why no systematic theoretical framework has been proposed by scholars for the study of this phenomenon. However, there are a number of existing theories or theoretical concepts in both the fields of translation studies and Biblical translation studies that may provide a useful theoretical framework for studying theological influence in Bible translation. These are the concepts of norms (Toury and Chesterman), narrative (Baker), constraints (Lefevere), “Skopos” (Nord), “contextual frame of reference” (Wendland), and Bible translation polysystem theory (Kerr). While none of these theoretical frameworks, when considered separately, can perfectly or completely describe the phenomenon of theological influence in Bible translation, when put together they do provide a comprehensive set of theoretical “tool kits” for describing the various facets of theological influence in Bible translation. With these five theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools at our disposal, it is possible for the multifaceted theological influence involved in Bible translation to be studied and described in a more objective and systematic way in order to achieve a greater awareness and understanding of their profound and consequential interrelationships.
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Theological Decolonization and Training Local Translators

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Abstract: Over the past several years in the United States, one paradigm-shifting theme in Christian higher education has been decolonization, the decentering of white, Western scholarship when it comes to theology and biblical interpretation. Concurrently, in SIL there has been a push toward localization, adopting the perspectives and structures that will allow people in a regional context to function in locally viable ways instead of foreign ones. Although the intent of localization is to reshape numerous areas of operation and organizational culture, when it comes to the area of training, sometimes the default focus has been on getting more “locals” to hold the microphone in training contexts, but not necessarily on evaluating the recommended teaching methods, the content that is considered standard, or the resources recommended to partners. This article summarizes some of the important insights from emerging key voices speaking to the issue of decolonizing theological training in the American seminary context. Reflecting and retooling existing local translator training in light of these insights would further the goals of localization, indigenized translations, and appropriately contextualized Scripture engagement.

1 Introduction

In Evangelical spaces, one of the recurring themes that has accompanied the conversation around racial justice for minorities in the United States has been the call to “decolonize” theological education. For a certain segment of the Western church, the idea of decolonization can sometimes be fraught with political connotations and engender fear of a dangerous liberal infiltration that will lead to abandoning biblical truth. But when given a fair hearing, the heart of
what minoritized Christians are actually advocating is very much in line with the goals of promoting flourishing in communities, and very much in line with the goal of localizing missions organizations and moving away from foreign modes of thinking and operating. Many of those who are involved in minority language Scripture translation efforts serve in communities who have suffered humiliation and harm under colonial systems, and many workers who come from Western, euro-centric cultures unknowingly perpetuate those systems in subtle ways worth examining.¹

A major paradigm shift that will likely affect the functioning and mission of the American church for decades to come is the shift from Western, predominantly white, predominantly Reformed Protestant methods and material for teaching Bible interpretation and Christian doctrine, to a more inclusive, diverse, and more broadly representative ideal. This shift is already affecting Christian higher education, seminary training, and training for cross-cultural mission workers in the West, as it becomes more and more recognized that the Christian center of gravity is now in the global south.² We are being asked, as Mitzi J. Smith, the first African-American woman to earn a PhD in New Testament from Harvard puts it, to “move in the direction of a decentered introduction to the NT that privileges many voices, concerns and scholarship of minoritized communities” (Smith et al. 2018:vii).

In his proposal of a framework for theological education that deals with the realities of diversity and plurality in a connected and globalized world, Seed (2021) traces the development of the idea of contextualization and its influence on Evangelical missions. He notes that the current Evangelical understanding of contextualization includes not just a “translational” element of assimilating the gospel into the life of the people in a specific cultural context, but also a countercultural “critical” element, which both affirms and challenges the historic context (116–117). Calls to decolonize could be seen as a part of this accepted Evangelical challenge to appropriately contextualize theological education by critically assessing the ways colonial Christianity, colonial languages, and imposed Western educational values and methods have shaped the cognitive environments and social contexts in which the word of God currently must be contextualized. Valuable insights from the recently renewed call to decolonize theological education could inform the way Bible translation organizations go about training local translation workers to exegete Scripture, so that they can

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Bible Translation Conference, Dallas, TX, 15 October 2021.

² See for example the impact of missiologist and historian Andrew Walls on Christian higher education (Weber 2021).
produce well-contextualized translations that are not as hindered by arbitrary Western cultural norms and values.

For example, in the summer of 2021 InterVarsity published the *First Nations Version New Testament*, an English version that attempts to capture speech and thought patterns familiar to North American Indigenous communities. The dedication of the *First Nations Version* reads:

> We pray the *First Nations Version* will bring healing to those who have suffered under the dominance of colonial governments who, with the help of churches and missionary organizations, often took our land, our languages, our cultures, and even our children. As our Tribal Nations work hard to reclaim what has been stolen, it is our hope that the colonial language that was forced upon us can now serve our people in a good way, by presenting Creator Sets Free (Jesus) in a more culturally relevant context (Rain Ministries 2021).

In speaking of this new version, project leader Terry Wildman told *Christianity Today*, “We believe it’s very important that the Gospel be kind of decolonized and told in a Native way, but being accurate to the meaning of the original language and understanding that it’s a different culture” (Miller 2021).

What does that mean? First, for those who are not as familiar with the conversation, I would like to clarify what is often meant by decolonization and summarize valuable takeaways that can be applied to the work of equipping and assisting local Bible translators. Second, I would like to propose three areas of examination and reflection for evaluating exegetical workshops or other Bible translation training that organizations are providing their local partners: Who teaches? How do we teach? What do we teach? Should anyone feel inspired to take up the challenge of retooling an existing training event in their context, the appendix offers a set of reflection questions that could guide an evaluation process.

2 Applicable principles of decolonization

Roman Catholic New Testament scholar Fernando Segovia has published a series of essays under the title *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins*, in which he argues that the history of biblical interpretation before postmodernism focused on methods of determining the “correct” or “objective” meaning of the text. Although these methods were often presented as a form of scientific inquiry, Segovia claims this was a guise for centering white, Western, male perspectives and using those perspectives as tools of hegemony. He argued that

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3 Segovia 2000.
multiple voices from diverse perspectives interacting with the Bible and dialoguing about the methods we use to study the text, the interpretations we accept as correct, and the people we hold up as experts in the discipline of biblical studies was a needed corrective. His focus was on reforming pedagogy, since theological training and education is the area that this hegemony is most powerfully manifest and maintained.

Two decades of conversation about the various ways culture impacts the interpretation, translation, and reading of the Bible have followed. Minority scholars and ministers are still on the margins in many ways and are still imploring the Western church to take seriously the necessity of decentering white, Western methods, interpretations, and experiences. This call has increased in volume as various crises and significant cultural moments have brought ongoing racial divisions and inequities in the United States and other countries with colonial histories into sharper focus.

Like many other broad concepts in sociology and education, terms are used and applied in different ways by different practitioners, and some of the perspectives on what constitutes decolonized biblical studies are likely to make Evangelicals very skeptical and nervous. In light of this potential for misunderstanding, it would be helpful to summarize the specific recommendations in view here for teaching theology and biblical exegesis and translation. Evangelicals could generally embrace these recommendations without compromising any of their core faith commitments about the authority

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4 For an overview of the history of calls to decolonize pedagogy and theological education in Latin America, see Hinze (2016). The decolonization process is described as teaching how to unlearn coloniality. “This pedagogy confronts destructive patterns of thought, feeling, decision-making, and acting that leave their marks on the psyche and the body. Decolonizing is deeply personal, but it is also always geographical and as such cultural, economic, social, and political...[U]nlearning coloniality entails decolonizing epistemology—the very conditions of how we think about ourselves, the world, and God. To accomplish this requires epistemological disobedience—that is, challenging the colonial matrix of knowledge and power, and the ways this matrix (mis)shapes one’s ways of understanding one’s self, others, and the basic conditions for thinking and acting” (2016:48–49).

5 For example, many decolonized readings of texts are based on principles of critical theory and assume that implicit power dynamics behind the text of the Bible itself must be identified and deconstructed as part of the hermeneutical process. Many Evangelicals would not find these interpretation methods consistent with their ideas of what it means to have a “high view of Scripture.” In this article, I am arguing for applying principles of decolonization to the pedagogy involved in theological training and the methods and expertise recommended in exegetical training, which is a different task.
and sufficiency of Scripture. These principles are encouraged at Evangelical institutions of higher learning and have been themes repeated over and over again in the past year by minority Christian leaders asking for change in this area.

- Diversify the “canon” of recommended texts, commentaries, and exegetical resources and make sure experts come from a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, life experiences, cultures, and Christian traditions.
- Analyze the ways pedagogy privileges some backgrounds, cultures, or experiences over others and work to mitigate the ways students are expected to conform to dominant cultural norms in the ways they learn, express themselves, and demonstrate mastery.
- Involve learners more equitably in selecting content and curriculum, in validating the expertise of authorities, in setting goals and objectives, and in creating knowledge.
- Recognize the inherent power dynamics in teacher/student or expert/novice interactions, especially when teachers and experts belong to a privileged culture, gender, or language group.
- Incorporate awareness that colonization, poverty, sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination and oppression experienced by marginalized people cause lasting psychological trauma. Effective exegetical training must be “trauma-informed” to deal sensitively with learners who have been victimized by these systems.

3 Who teaches? Reflecting on diversity of instructors

As foreign translation organizations have emphasized efforts to “localize” their organizational presence in the countries in which they operate, there has been progress in many places toward more inclusive and diverse teaching staff for workshops and other training events. In SIL Mexico for example, a variety of workshops that in the past were taught in English by Western, ex-patriate instructors are now taught in Spanish by Mexican, Latin American, and Indigenous instructors.

However, it is important to ask if these changes in teaching personnel have created organic changes in teaching methods and content. If organizations have simply trained a more diverse-looking group to do the same things the white Western teachers did, using the same Western resources, and teaching according to the same Western learning preferences, then the result falls short of truly decolonized local ownership.

Even with local instructors doing the training, there are most likely still racial or ethnic hierarchies in place, depending on the history of the country. As
Smith puts it, “Often race, ethnicity, and gender are not just the elephant in the room; it built the room” (Smith et al. 2018:3). If we are trading a North American or European colonizer power dynamic for a more local flavor of colonizer power dynamic, that is not decolonization. For example, Mexico is a colonized country and the Indigenous partners we train are members of racialized minority groups. It is not sufficient to pay attention only to racial power dynamics between white North American and European translation workers and their Mexican or Latin American colleagues, because Mexico and other countries of Latin America have their own colonial pasts that influence the context. Instructors need to understand how racial or ethnic oppression and privilege work in the national context they work in, not just how they work in their various countries of origin or on international teams.

It is also important to understand the dynamics of tokenism in the training context and proactively work against it. In Latin America, it might be true that Indigenous groups under Spanish colonizing culture have some similar experiences and traumas. It might be true that Hispanic members have some similar experiences navigating imported Anglo-American norms in an organizational culture. But Indigenous cultures and languages are diverse and so are the cultures and colonial histories of Latin American countries. In attempts to promote diversity on teaching staff, it is necessary to guard against majority culture members’ tendency to flatten the unique cultural perspectives of a people group into a generically representative Mexican Indigenous or Latin American perspective.

4 How do we teach? Reflecting on decentering Western methods

If more diverse teaching staff does not significantly change how material is taught, then there is more decolonizing work to do. One kind of training offered by SIL Mexico is focused on mastering information and developing skills that are considered important so that translators will understand and interpret Scripture well before they attempt translation. For example, there are workshops that teach about the cultural background of Israel, as well as the translation of key biblical terms, specific biblical genres like poetry, and certain NT books that are challenging. Aspects of culture affect the approach to presenting new information and teaching new skills. In SIL Mexico, many of the workshops have been designed in ways that privilege Western teaching and learning preferences, and they need to be evaluated for the ways they impose these preferences as normative and correct in disadvantaging colonial ways.

Most cross-cultural workers have been trained in cross-cultural competence and communication, and many of them apply this awareness to their
personal interactions in the communities where they work and in their personal cross-cultural relationships. But they are sometimes not as cognizant of the Western biases in their teaching, and they are not as knowledgeable about how people prefer to learn in the cultural contexts where they work. It can often be the case that local partners are trained by Westerners to teach in ways that minimize and devalue their preferred ways of teaching, learning, and demonstrating mastery.

Three decades ago, cross-cultural education specialists Earle and Dorothy Bowen noted, “In most parts of the world colonized by Europeans, the assumption made by colonizers was that there had been no educational system in place until they came. Therefore, they imposed their style of education on the people and ignored the existing educational system” (Bowen and Bowen 1991:204). Education specialists and learners who are minorities in a Western culture dominant educational setting have noted many ways that Western teaching norms fail to prioritize the learning preferences of Indigenous or other non-Western learners. Areas that can be problematic involve what aspects of teaching and learning are centered and elevated and what aspects are undervalued or excluded.

For example, it is widely noted that Western teaching styles tend to elevate the abstract over the concrete or embodied, inductive learning over deductive learning, print modes over oral modes, expertise in disembodied texts over expertise in role models, verbal explanations and notetaking over modeling or demonstration, individual work and accountability over group work and accountability, competition over cooperation, and the use of direct vs. indirect communication. Not all of these values will be a good match for a specific non-Western learning context.7

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6 Minority theologians point out that much of the Western theological endeavor has been defining and debating abstract ideas, and this is what those in that tradition tend to focus on when they read and apply Scripture. Cherokee missiologist Randy Woodley cautions against interpreting Scripture through lenses of Platonic dualism inherited from the Greeks, a worldview that “absolutizes the realm of the abstract and reduces the importance of the concrete, disengaging them from one another” (Woodley 2019). At times Western missionaries have been quick to label Indigenous attempts at cultural contextualization of the Bible’s message syncretistic, all the while failing to acknowledge the degree to which cultural syncretism has shaped their own theological ideas, biblical interpretations, and ethics.

7 These priorities are typical of the Western “banking education” model that has been imposed through colonial education systems around the world. The need to address these differences has been noted by development workers approaching training from the
Western-style courses tend to arrange teaching schedules around compartmentalized sessions focusing on decontextualized abstract subjects, and during these sessions, we frequently switch learning tasks to prevent boredom. Many non-Western cultures prefer holistic or integrated tasks applied to more concrete problems, where extended periods of time are devoted to the task before moving on to something different.\footnote{For an example of application of non-Western learning preferences to course design, see Schwab (2018).}

Instructors should be informed about ways colonial school systems may have inflicted racial trauma on Indigenous people groups by using education as a means of forced assimilation into a dominant culture or language. Many minority language speakers have experienced devastating attempts in classroom settings to eradicate their language and culture, and when the training we offer closely replicates these kinds of classroom settings, it can be psychologically triggering.

Additionally, perceived power dynamics or cultural power distance mismatches may have a powerful effect on the learning environment. The ways teachers provide evaluation and feedback, and the ways students are asked for evaluation and feedback should take into consideration the cultural dynamics of saving face and politeness strategies. An important part of course planning and preparation is incorporating feedback from students and learning from each training session how to improve. When instructors seek feedback on their courses or training, they should make sure that they are providing decolonized channels of feedback. Individually written, anonymous course evaluation forms or surveys privilege many Western values and preferences and might not be the best way to get honest constructive feedback. They also tend to impose predetermined categories of what should be evaluated and the standards that should be used. It might be the case that learners would prefer oral debriefing sessions with a neutral intermediary who will communicate the feedback to instructors at a later time. Or learners might prefer ways to provide spontaneous, relational feedback throughout the course instead of cumulative evaluation at the end. Some learners might prefer communicating with the other learners and sending a spokesperson who then delivers a group consensus to the instructors. Instructors should reflect on whether the ways they are asking for and giving feedback are appropriately sensitive to what is considered shameful and honorable or disrespectful and polite in the context.

theoretical framework of educators such as Paulo Freire (e.g., Participatory Methods) and Jane Vella (e.g., Learning that Lasts).
5 What do we teach? Reflecting on decentering Western materials

If a banquet is a metaphor for theology resources offered to learners, for a long time whatever white, Western, Enlightenment-influenced males brought to the table has been associated with the main course. Students have been taught to view these resources as the “meat and potatoes,” the nutritious and hearty part of the meal that will promote intellectual growth and health. Instead of viewing the biblical scholarship done from Eastern, African, Hispanic, Caribbean, or Indigenous perspectives, or from a woman’s perspective as an additional dish for the main course, (perhaps mole and tortillas instead of meat and potatoes), these offerings have often been treated as a sauce or spice that brings additional flavor to the white, male, Enlightenment fare. In some cases, these resources from other perspectives have not been viewed as real food, but rather an indulgent dessert that could finish off an already satisfying meal. Or they have been treated like exotic and somewhat disgusting dishes meant to be sampled and pushed away. Perhaps some of the feminist scholarship and liberation theology was deemed so unhealthy and unpalatable, it got scraped into the garbage before anyone got to the table. Decolonization is a plea to put all the scholarship out on the same table as essential to the banquet.

When examining training, instructors must look at where they get the content they decide people need to master in order to be considered qualified and competent, and they should ask which experts are informing this content. If the instructors are only consulting exegetical resources and commentaries written by Westerners, centering that content to the exclusion of other perspectives would be considered a form of theological colonialism. Similarly, if the only resources held out to learners as expert, reliable, and trusted are written by white Westerners, it communicates a hierarchy that devalues and diminishes other perspectives.9

9 Gaddis (2016) examines how consultants handled translation controversies over the translation of oinos in a Nigerian context. Chapter 5 “Cultural Imperialism and the Controversy over Cana” deals with subtle forms of cultural imperialism, something that occurs when it is expected that Western cultural assumptions will dominate or have a privileged influence on debated translation decisions. Although his case study involved the process of giving consultant feedback on completed translations, the tendency to subtly pressure learners toward conventional Western theological assumptions and interpretive choices can affect every level of translation training. Because it is a form of implicit bias to assume that Western interpretations are “naturally” more correct or rational, rooting that out and addressing the unfair hierarchies it imposes requires intentional reflection.
Trauma awareness is another important area of consideration when reflecting on how learners are taught to interpret and interact with biblical texts. Being trauma-informed in the context of exegetical training means being aware of ways specific biblical texts have been used in a particular social or cultural context to justify the domination of one group over another. For example, New Testament scholar Esau McCaulley (2020:71) discusses how the exegesis of Romans 13:1–7 about submitting to governing authorities must be approached sensitively in communities who have suffered under unjust policing or have used civil disobedience to protest racial injustice. In communities where biblical texts have been used to justify or rationalize the abuse or subjugation of women, those texts must be approached in a trauma-informed way. In communities who have experienced forced displacement at the hands of colonizers, Old Testament texts about Israelite conquest must be handled in a trauma-informed way.

If a colonial language and colonial religious settings have been part of formative experiences in the lives of translators, then key terms lists in the colonial language might bring up baggage that needs to be unpacked before translators can recommend how to best render those terms in their other languages. As theologian Willie James Jennings explains, “Indeed, it is as though Christianity, wherever it went in the modern colonies, inverted its sense of hospitality. It claimed to be the host, the owner of the spaces it entered, and demanded native people enter its cultural logics, its ways of being in the world and its conceptualities” (Tisby 2021:9). For example, if the colonial language word for ‘sin’ has been used in a translator’s background to discourage morally neutral Indigenous cultural practices or Indigenous language use, or has been used to engender race-based shame, then instructors need to be aware of this racial trauma and help translators process it.10

This area of trauma awareness is an area that Bible translation organizations need to pay more attention to in order to truly promote holistic flourishing in communities in response to Scripture engagement initiatives. If instructors are insensitive to or unaware of the ways Scripture and Christian terminology or concepts have been used by colonizing or dominating cultural power brokers, they will not be as effective at helping local translators contextualize them well in local languages so they can be used in healing and empowering ways instead. Michael Anderson uses the helpful metaphor of treaty and land to describe how Western missionaries and Bible scholars have often entered Indigenous contexts with an attitude of ownership concerning the biblical text and its interpretation. He advocates an “Aware-Settler” hermeneutic that is always analyzing the ways that Western Bible scholarship and interpretations have failed to “share the land” of the Bible with colonized

10 Thank you to FNV translator Terry Wildman for this insightful observation.
cultures, and the damage that this has already caused and needs to be reckoned with in Indigenous Christian contexts. By first recognizing “the impropriety of Settler academics’ and Settler religious institutions’ claims to ownership of these texts,” it is possible to recognize “the sovereignty of the different groups that ‘live’ on the Land of the texts” (Anderson 2019:61).

Decolonization of content also means placing more emphasis on the role local partners have in arriving at the biblical interpretations that are considered authoritative. Translators come with expertise in their language, cultural frames of reference, and community norms. They bring experience and wisdom from their experience with God, their service to the church, and their own spiritual maturity which produces wisdom, discernment, and character. Decolonized training seeks out opportunities to acknowledge, validate, and showcase the expertise local translators bring to the table, instead of simply pointing to the expertise and authority of outsiders. Instructors and course designers should ask how local pastoral wisdom, local experiences, and local expertise are informing not just the translation process, but also the exegetical process and the process of evaluating competing interpretations.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this introduction to exploring how the idea of decolonization can be practically applied to Bible translation training is intended to invite conversation about how to evaluate the ways Western values and perspectives are imposed on non-Western colleagues and collaborators. The goal is not only to remove roadblocks to truly local expressions of Bible translation organizations and truly indigenous translated scriptures. It is also about decentering Western methods and material in order to make space for the whole church to hear from and edify the whole church.

Returning to the First Nations Version mentioned above, translator Terry Wildman described the response to his decolonized translation from English-speaking communities around the world in an interview with Faithfully Magazine.

And so it’s really been amazing. We’ve had people from Ireland and Great Britain that have told us they love it. We’ve had Asian people tell us they love it, and use it, and read it. So we believe it’s going to go to a lot of non-Native people, and we think that as we look at other Indigenous cultures, this may be a tool, a way to help them connect. So we see this as not only a gift to our Native people, but a gift from our Native people to other cultures and people, and to the dominant culture (Upshaw 2021).
This is the goal of the whole decolonization endeavor. It is about making space for the gifts that would bless the whole church if there was a more intentional effort to remove barriers that colonial attitudes and the centering of white Western perspectives and preferences have put in the way. Then the church could sit together at a more delicious, more bountiful, and more satisfying banquet.
Appendix

The following questions can be used as a tool for reflection on how current training events might need to be retooled to move in the direction of decolonization.

**Reflection questions for evaluating Bible translation training events**

*Teachers and learners*

What proportion of the teaching staff are teaching cross-culturally?

How do expectations about power distance between students and teachers or experts and novices in the cultural context affect the training event and have these expectations been adequately taken into consideration?

Is there an added layer of increased or decreased power differential for some staff because of differences between them and the typical student (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, economic status, education level)? How are these power differentials mediated at the training event?

Are there context-specific ethnic tensions or colonial histories that potentially affect the way teaching staff interacts with students or the way students perceive the teaching staff?

What proportion of the staff are “local”?

How does the diversity of the teaching staff compare to the demographics of a typical cohort of learners?

How much latitude do local teachers have to select or modify the content, schedule, teaching methods, or forms of evaluation?

What proportion of students are learning in a language that is not their preferred language for learning? What accommodations are made to mediate the difficulties this might present?

Are learners able to process their learning and work on instructional tasks with others who speak their preferred learning language?

Are learners able to process their learning and work on instructional tasks with others who share their cultural frames of reference?

What is done to ensure students in a significant minority group (e.g., because of gender, socio-economic status, marital status, age, race/culture/ethnicity,
education level, faith background, or language proficiency) are meaningfully included and respected?

What kind of trauma is typical in the background of students (e.g., child abuse, gender-based violence or discrimination, racialization and racism, displacement, religious persecution, language-based discrimination, food insecurity, natural disasters, war, corrupt policing/justice system)?

Is the teaching staff sufficiently educated on relevant history and current events in their teaching context to be aware of content or expectations that students with trauma may be sensitive to?

What kinds of classroom situations or interpersonal interactions typically make a student feel ashamed or anxious, and what efforts are taken to avoid or mitigate these situations?

Are student achievements validated in a way that confers honor in their context?

**Authority and expertise**

What resources are instructors using to inform the content of the training event?

  What proportion of these resources are authored or presented by non-Westerners?
  What proportion have been translated from a different language or cultural context?
  What proportion of these resources are authored or presented by people who share the typical student’s cultural frames of reference?
  What proportion of these resources are authored or presented by people who are representative of various student’s faith backgrounds (e.g., Pentecostal/charismatic, Muslim background believer, Roman Catholic)?
  What proportion of these resources are authored or presented by people who speak the typical student’s language?

What resources are students specifically directed to interact with or consult for answers?

  What proportion of these resources are authored or presented by non-Westerners?
  What proportion are translated from a different language or cultural context?
  What proportion of these resources are authored or presented by people who share the typical student’s cultural frames of reference?
What proportion of these resources are authored or presented by people who speak the typical student’s language?

If students differ from the majority of people held up in the course as experts (either the instructors or resource providers) are they introduced to any experts who represent their perspective (culture/ethnicity, faith tradition) or have similar life experiences?

In what ways does this course acknowledge, validate, or showcase the expertise students bring?

Are there ways in which local lifestyles or life experiences would be perceived as abnormal, substandard, or disadvantaged by the experts held up as role models?

**Training methods**

Think about the following aspects of learning and whether this element dominates the training event, whether the aspect is balanced with other aspects, or whether the aspect is rare or missing. Then evaluate whether the aspects that are dominating make sense given what is known about power dynamics, student backgrounds, and student learning preferences. If aspects are rare or missing, evaluate whether incorporating them into the training event might be more beneficial to students. If student preferences in these areas are not known, how could evaluations be designed to get informative feedback?

- Students spend time working alone.
- Students are coached by a mentor or more experienced peer.
- Students read texts or interpret print material (e.g., charts, maps, diagrams, slides).
- Students spend time listening to experts present content.
- Students spend time listening to experts evaluate students’ contributions or performance.
- Students spend time listening to other students.
- Students are accountable for individual work.
- Students are accountable for group work.
- Students speak for themselves as an individual.
- Students speak through a designated spokesperson.
- Students are asked to perform spontaneously during the course session without preparation or practice.
- Students are asked to present something they have prepared or practiced outside of the course session.
- Students observe an expert model doing something they will be asked to do.
Students copy or mimic an expert model.
Students provide feedback to their peers.
Students provide feedback to the instructors.
Students create content or make decisions that shape the instruction.
Students learn general definitions, principles, or procedures and then are expected to apply them to specific examples, problems, or tasks.
Students are given examples, scenarios, or role plays and asked to derive general principles, problem-solving skills, or procedures from them.
Learning begins with looking at a whole and proceeds to break the whole into component parts.
Learning begins with looking at component parts and builds up to understanding a whole.
Students interact with abstract concepts or ideas.
Students interact with concrete examples, stories, and scenarios.
The course schedule compartmentalizes discrete topics or subjects into short sessions.
The course schedule allows for extended time working on holistic tasks that integrate multiple topics or subjects in an applied way.
The training event closely replicates a classroom experience in a colonialist school setting.
Activities foster a competitive environment between students.
Activities foster a cooperative environment between students.
References


At Home in All Languages and Cultures
Bible Translation and World Christianity in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract: Bible translation enables the advance of what Lamin Sanneh (2007a) calls a “World Christianity,” a global religion which aims to be at home in every context. As such, Bible translation empowers and yet relativises all languages and cultures, thereby furthering an equality in dignity among the speakers of all the languages of the world. In this paper, we ask: To what extent does the current and blossoming Bible translation movement contribute to the growth and maturing of a World Christianity? In other words, in what ways do current engagements in Bible translation further or hinder the reality of Christianity as a religion that aims to be at home in all languages and cultures? To approach this question, we will use the framework proposed by Andrew Walls (1997), which claims that the process of the transmission and reception of Christianity is multi-generational, involving at least three stages. We will aim to discern the stage at which the current Bible translation movement operates in the twenty-first century, identify some of the critical issues that affect the reception of the gospel, and suggest implications for Bible translation practice that would effectively further the rise of a World Christianity.

1 Introduction

In 2007, Lamin Sanneh gave a conference on “Bible Translation and the Birth of Christianity as a World religion.” Contrasting the significance of the impact of Bible translation with the missionary expansion of Islam, he stated: “Well, Christians take this business for granted, but have they thought about the implication of what they are doing?” (2007a:1). His abundant scholarly body of
work has allowed everyone to appraise Bible translation beyond its “nuts and bolts” in order to discern its fundamental meaning and value. Indeed, translation remains a vulnerable activity with high risks when considered from the viewpoint of the process of the faithful transmission of the message from one language and culture to another. However, Bible translation preserves the essence of Christianity as a religion without a fixed language, culture, or location. It empowers and yet relativises all languages and cultures, thereby furthering an equality in dignity among the speakers of all the languages of the world. As such, it is the “primary, critical, leavening, or catalytic action in the spread of the Christian faith” (Gitau 2020:3). In other words, Bible translation enables the advance of what Sanneh calls a “World Christianity.” By this, he refers to Christianity as a global religion which aims to be at home in every context. Therefore, “World Christianity” is the inter-discipline that explores the processes of the transmission, reception, conversion, and appropriation of the Gospel all over the world.

At the biennial Bible Translation Conference in Dallas, Texas, we seek to consider the impact of Bible translation and question our assumptions, strategies, and practices. In line with Sanneh’s main contribution relative to the processes of the reception of the gospel, we will consider in this paper some searching questions: To what extent does our current and blossoming Bible translation movement contribute to the growth and maturing of a World Christianity? In other words, in what ways do our current engagements in Bible translation further or hinder the reality of Christianity as a religion that aims to be at home in all contexts of the world?

To approach this question, we will use the framework proposed by Walls (1997), which claims that the process of the transmission and reception of Christianity is multigenerational, involving at least three stages. I will aim to discern the stage at which the current Bible translation movement operates in the twenty-first century, identify some of the critical issues that affect the reception of the Gospel, and suggest implications for Bible translation practice that would effectively further the rise of a World Christianity.

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1 The following three books are of special interest: Translating the Message (1989), Whose Religion is Christianity? (2003), and Disciples of All Nations (2007).

2 This paper is a revised version of the author’s Lamin Sanneh Lecture at the Bible Translation Conference, Dallas, TX, 16 October 2021.

3 A summary of this framework can also be found in Bediako (2000:80–81).
2 The cross-cultural process of the transmission and reception of the Gospel

In his book, The Missionary Movement in Christian History, Andrew Walls examines the process of the transmission and reception of the Gospel across the cultures throughout Church history. He identifies two opposing tendencies that are inherent to the Gospel. The first one, the indigenising principle, holds that each person should be at home within their own culture as a Christian because God accepts each of us “as we are” and the “Christian mind will continue to be influenced by what was in it before” (Walls 1996:7). Bible translation is critical to achieve this principle because it allows the languages that capture the sociocultural experience of a people to become the receptacle and vehicle of God’s message. Thus, Bible translation creates the appropriate conditions for people to enter into an effective dialogue within their specific cultural identity. Sanneh notes that failure to appropriately achieve this principle would cause new believers to be like “stags in borrowed fields, not sheep in their own meadow” (2007b:7). On the other hand, the pilgrim principle calls the Christian to resist any attempts to domesticate the faith within a particular culture and “warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society” (Walls 1996:8). Sanneh (2007b:4) sums up these two principles in the following question: “How can Christianity maintain its commitment to culture, insofar as culture embodies faith in a concrete way, while avoiding the sort of cultural idolatry that fuses claims and exclusive national ideals? How is cultural commitment compatible with religious openness?”

As he studied the missionary movement throughout Christian history, Walls observed that these principles apply through three generational stages—missionary, convert, and refuguration—to achieve effective reception and appropriation of Christianity. For example, he depicts Hellenistic conversion as follows: in the missionary stage, Paul introduces the concepts of the Gospel that discard Judaic elements and wear Hellenistic garments for the first time. Later on (convert stage), the Greeks themselves grapple with their Christian and Hellenistic identities in order to discern how to believe and live. The next generation (refuguration) redirects the Hellenistic intellectual heritage to achieve ownership of the Gospel and then takes it beyond their own culture. Today we can observe that several aspects of the Hellenistic worldview (i.e., dualism of body and soul) and various socio-political concepts (ekklesia, euangelion, kurios, etc.) were loaded with new meanings and redirected to guide the way we understand the Gospel today. As Sanneh notes, the failure to achieve effective conversion results in mere proselytism. He describes and contrasts the two perspectives as follows (see 2007b:8–11):
Throughout history, it has been evident that Bible translation and the processes of cultural appropriation of the Christian faith that it triggers are foundational to turning proselytes into converts. This process essentially happens during the “convert” and “refiguration” stages, as proselytes continue to operate “their social and personal patterns of life and thought, with Christianity [in its originating missionary state] challenging and upsetting pagan premises of those patterns” (Sanneh 2007b:9).

As we consider the Bible translation movement in the twenty-first century in the light of this framework, it is appropriate to question the season or stage in which we currently operate. By doing so, we would best discern the practices that would further the possibility for each person to feel at home with Christianity, irrespective of their sociocultural or linguistic setting. From all observation, two centuries of the modern missionary movement have almost led to the completion of the first stage. The end of colonial rule in many parts of the world around the 1970s constitutes an approximative landmark. The assumptions, strategies, and systems that have undergirded the practice of Bible translation have been inspired by the impacts of the missionary phase of Bible translation. However, as we now operate in a mostly post-missionary era in Bible translation, the issues of the “convert” and “refiguration” stages of Walls’ framework should be shaping our agenda and practices. Before exploring what that might entail, let us first consider the impact of the missionary stage.

3 The impact of missionary Bible translation

The impact of missionary Bible translation has been the main object of Sanneh’s academic exploration.4 Using Africa as a reference point, we observe that Bible

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4 His seminal book entitled *Translating the Message* (1989) built on thorough field research and provided a compelling statement of the impact of missionary translations. It put to rest the wave of criticism of Western mission that had laid doubts on mission, and stimulated Bible agencies and translators who found the impetus to proceed with conviction.
translation plays an irreplaceable role in the process of the transmission and reception of the Gospel.

It is commonly recognised that the gospel reached Africa through four phases. In hindsight, it can be observed that the sustainability of any of those phases depended heavily on the place and role of vernacular translation therein.

3.1 First phase

In the first century, Mark took the gospel into Northern Africa where early Christian communities were started. From there the Gospel soon spread into Egypt and Ethiopia through the action of Jewish believers. Over the following centuries, the important apostolic work in the Northern African Church gave rise to prominent theologians who became Church Fathers (Origen, Athanasius, Cyril, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine). However, as Philip Jenkins has documented, despite its robust theological activity, this Church did not engage the vernacular. As a result, Christians lacked the foundation and roots that would enable them to resist the Muslim invasion in the seventh century. Conversely, the Ge’ez and Coptic communities in Egypt that embraced the vernacular developed the capacity to preserve their Christian heritage and withstand the Vandal conquest in the fifth century and the Islamic jihad in the seventh century.\(^5\)

3.2 Second phase

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Portuguese explorers took the Gospel into the coastal regions of the continent. They established hospitals and schools, and whole villages and kingdoms declared themselves Christian. But they gave no attention to the vernacular languages and Bible translation. By the eighteenth century, there was no visible sign of a Christian presence in the region, and even the symbols of the Christian faith that were still present had lost their meaning among the communities.\(^6\)

\(^5\) “Partly the Egyptian Church retained such a mass following because of its enthusiastic adoption of the native Coptic language. At least, the Gospels and Psalter were already available in Coptic by around 300. Elsewhere in North Africa, the church’s insistence on speaking Latin meant that it never evangelized far beyond the cities, so that Christianity did not long survive the Muslim Conquests. But Egypt offered a different picture” (Jenkins 2011:25).

\(^6\) Sanneh writes that “French missionaries discovered one such village north of the river Zaire, in 1773, its identity proclaimed by a great cross. Without regular priesthood...such communities in time lapsed from their Christian faith” (2007b:102). “When the famed Scottish missionary David Livingstone reached Angola in 1854 on his...
3.3 Third phase

The ongoing movement of the Christian faith in sub-Saharan Africa owes itself to the modern mission movement that began in the nineteenth century. As a later outcome of the Reformation that was birthed from the translation of God’s Word into European languages, this movement emphasized Bible translation into vernacular languages as its main foundation. It has ushered in the fourth phase: the current vibrant Bible translation movement. (I will return to this later.)

3.4 Evaluating the impact of missionary translations

Examining these four phases of the evangelisation of Africa, what stands out is that the first two phases could not be sustained, whereas the third phase continues to mature into the fourth. What accounts for this difference is Bible translation.

Sanneh has documented the impact of missionary translations as follows.

1. **Bible translation satisfies God’s justice by furthering the dignity of all people as created in God’s image.**

   The advent of Scriptures in the languages and cultures of people for the first time has meant a lot more than the mere availability of new information. It has primarily been viewed as affirmation that their languages qualify as recipients of the revelation of the Creator God. Language is such an intimate and pervasive reality that each individual language shapes and affects—for good or bad—all those whose identity and worldview have been formed within the categories of that language. Therefore, Westermann writes that “the most adequate exponent of the soul of a people is its language. By taking away a people’s language, we cripple and destroy its soul and kill its mental individuality…” (Diedrich Westermann as quoted in Sanneh 2007b:178–179). Because language carries such significance for its native speakers, people have found in the translated Scriptures a basis for the recovery of their true identity that was damaged by the fall of mankind and its subsequent manifestations through various forms of discrimination. Sanneh observed that the advent of mother tongue Scriptures went a long way to allow people to recover their sense of dignity as human beings created in God’s image. A local Christian holding a translated Gospel in his hands for the first time declared, “Here is a document which proves that we also are human beings: the first and only book in our language.” Another in a different trek across the continent, the only evidence of Jesuit and Capuchin churches he found was in ruins, and Christianity among Africans was reduced to a folk memory” (2007b:105).
context affirmed, “Now we see that our friends in the foreign countries regard us as people worthwhile.” Yet another said, “I know that in my body I am a very little man, but today as I see the whole Bible in my language, I feel as big as a mountain” (Sanneh 2007b:177).

2. **Bible translation preserves the essence of Christianity as a “translated” religion.**

From his cultural experience and research, Sanneh discovered that Islam is a fixed religion with a fixed centre and a fixed language. In contrast to Islam, Christianity relies on the vulnerable activity of translation for its spread, expansion, and vitality. He went on to assert (2003:105–106) that: “The fact of Christianity being a translated, and translating, religion places God at the center of the universe of cultures, implying free coequality among cultures and a necessary relativizing of languages vis-à-vis the truth of God. No culture is so advanced and so superior that it can claim exclusive access or advantage to the truth of God, and none so marginal or inferior that it can be excluded...The vernacular was thereby given the kiss of life.” The fact that translation is an inherent feature of the Gospel means that it repositions God’s Word at the center of the created universe with its cultural and linguistic diversity, thereby elevating languages and cultures into missional categories. In the meantime, it reinforces the point that all people, created in God’s image, are equal in dignity.

3. **Bible translation enables the reception of the Gospel, empowers local cultures and languages, and furthers the rise of a World Christianity.**

Sanneh noted that the story of the modern missionary enterprise was told solely from the vantage point of the “foreign transmission” which emphasized the various processes that were organised, funded, and directed from the West (Westernisation). As such, the imperialist motives of the enterprise and attitudes of some missionaries led observers and concerned anthropologists to condemn the destructive impact of the mission on cultures. While Sanneh does not deny such motives in the mission agenda, he claims that any generalisation misrepresents the truth about thousands of genuine missionaries who withstood the colonial dominion to share the love of Christ around the world. Looking at it from

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He writes that “many missionaries felt there simply was no other way to do business except to uphold the native cause, however begrudgingly, to the alarm of colonial officials but to the critical welcome of Africans” (2007b:181–182). He goes on to cite the examples...
the vantage point of the “local reception,” Sanneh notes that missionaries and especially Bible translators contributed to the empowerment of local communities and cultures through the production of Scriptures, grammars, dictionaries, folktales, etc. (what he calls “vernacularisation”). Moreover, the ability of people to engage God’s Word in the categories of their own languages and cultures triggered results that were not anticipated, even by the imperialists. As an example, Sanneh noted in Kenya that “the fact that the Gikuyu Bible contained stories of slavery and freedom, captivity and liberation, exile and homecoming, death and resurrection, made it a primer for the decolonisation campaign and a godsend for nationalist aspirations” (2007b:151). Bible translation, therefore, has the intrinsic potential to subvert imperialist motives and re-establish God’s purposes for mankind. As such, the missional and strategic foundation of Bible translation is firm.

However, the factors and realities that condition the impact of Bible translation continue to shift over time. As we continue to thread into the post-missionary Bible translation era, it is necessary to embrace double-loop learning (see Argyris and Schön 1974), for which I advocated at the BT conference in 2019 (see Kenmogne 2020:9). In other words, our responsibility is not just to evaluate our impact relative to the strategies and approaches that we deploy. We need to go a level deeper to consider the fundamental assumptions that we hold about how we position Bible translation and Scripture engagement to contribute to the emergence of Christianity as a world religion in the twenty-first century. Therefore, we need to appraise our context today in light of the key realities and issues that shape it.

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More specifically, the leader of the fight for Kenyan independence, Jomo Kenyatta, found inspiration from reading the story of Naboth’s vineyard in the Gikuyu Bible. He withstood the British imperial dominion over his country, trusting that it was a just cause for which God was on his and the Kenyans’ side.
4 The post-missionary era\(^9\) in Bible translation: issues and realities

In 1999, John Watters considered the pace of Bible translation and noted that, all things being equal, it would still take about 150 years for all the language communities of the earth to have a Scripture translation. This shocking realisation led Wycliffe and SIL International to resolve to see “a Bible translation programme started in any language needing one by the year 2025” (Watters 1999). The impetus of this vision and the sense of urgency that it stimulated within the whole movement led the participants at the Lausanne Cape Town gathering in 2010 to resolve to eradicate Bible poverty. More recently, the Every Tribe Every Nation alliance has made a commitment towards the eradication of Bible poverty by adopting an All Access Goal\(^{10}\) by the year 2033. Today, we observe an unprecedented movement of generosity\(^{11}\) towards Bible translation and the fastest pace ever in the history of Bible translation.\(^{12}\) We live in an exciting season in the history of mission, a season that is characterized by unprecedented speed and productivity in Bible translation. However, we also

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\(^9\) The concept of “post-missionary era” is used to reflect the shifts in the demographics of mission. However, it still assumes that Christians from various continents, nationalities, and cultural backgrounds work together in Bible translation as a collective expression of their participation in the missio dei.

\(^{10}\) 95% of the global population will have access to a full Bible (languages with greater than 500,000 speakers); 99.96% of the global population will have access to a New Testament (languages with greater than 5,000 speakers and less than 500,000 speakers); 100% of the world’s population will have access to at least some portion of Scripture (portion estimated as twenty-five chapters in languages with less than 5000 speakers). Access to a second translation will be available in the world’s most strategic one hundred written languages, which is estimated to include critical revisions completed in twenty-six of these languages (Every Tribe Every Nation 2022).

\(^{11}\) The illumiNations Foundation has allowed Bible agencies to form a common front to present the Bible translation needs to high-net-worth individuals. As a result, we have observed from one year to the next an increasing generosity towards Bible translation amounting to $40+ million donated or pledged to BT over a single event.

\(^{12}\) In 1999, we realized that the current pace of translation meant a translation would not be started in every language that needed one until 2150. At that time, there were 2,601 languages with access to some Scripture or Scripture stories. By 2021, that number had grown to 3,495 languages with Scripture or Scripture-related products. Currently, active translation or preparatory work is underway in 2,899 languages, which means we are on pace to start all needed translations by 2034. Translation is still needed to begin in 1,892 languages, representing 145 million people (Liner 2021:10).
need to ensure that we achieve fruitfulness by ensuring that the speed of the production of Scriptures aligns with the speed of their local reception through effective engagement. By this, and in line with our topic, I mean that our progress in translation should not only be a matter of statistics but should be equated with transformed and flourishing lives and communities that reflect the presence of Christ among them. In order to appraise some of the realities and issues that inform our impact, let us briefly consider the shifts between the missionary and post-missionary eras in Bible translation.

4.1 Bible translation: missionary vs. post-missionary

In the following table, I provide a summary comparison of the key factors that inform the impact of translation and how these factors continue to shift in response to external realities around the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of Vernacular</th>
<th>Missionary Phase</th>
<th>Post-Missionary Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viable and vital</td>
<td>Neglected</td>
<td>Oppressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation BT and Church</th>
<th>Missionary Phase</th>
<th>Post-Missionary Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BT as a valid part of the Church</td>
<td>BT separate and alongside the Church</td>
<td>Re-envisioning the relationship of BT to the Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BT Agenda and Corpus</th>
<th>Missionary Phase</th>
<th>Post-Missionary Phase</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bibles in print Primers Catechisms Songbooks Grammars Dictionaries, etc.</td>
<td>Bibles in print Primers Catechisms Songbooks Grammars Dictionaries, etc.</td>
<td>Bibles (various formats) Customized response to other language and Scripture product needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency Leadership in BT</th>
<th>Missionary Phase</th>
<th>Post-Missionary Phase</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign missionary</td>
<td>Parachurch Bible agencies</td>
<td>Indigenous Bible agencies and churches with foreign support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reviewing the impact of the missionary translations, Sanneh concluded, “the Christian impact overlapped almost exactly with the incidence of translation of Scripture into vernacular languages, almost everywhere…” (2007a:1). Yet I would like to note important shifts in the factors that undergird Bible translation when comparing the missionary and post-missionary eras. This
implies that, if our assumptions and practices remain unchecked, we cannot or should not expect translations to achieve the same impacts.

4.2 Post-missionary issues and impact

If Bible translation was indeed the catalyst of the current Church growth in the global South, we need to humbly question the impact of the thousands of translations that have been produced within the languages of the world over the past decades. Indeed, there is much to celebrate in terms of transformed lives and communities and churches experiencing spiritual renewal and growth. However, we must sincerely acknowledge that our impact is often anecdotal.

Observers of the Church in the Southern Hemisphere have noted—beyond the statistics—a number of paradoxes that raise a question mark on the deeper-level impact of our exuberant Bible translation activities. In the post-missionary era, the Church is plagued with a number of issues that point to the fact that the reception of the Gospel has not gone beyond the proselyte stage. In his book entitled *Beyond the Figures: Growing the Roots of Christianity in Africa* (2019), Paul Kimbi mentions some of the paradoxes in the Church of the Southern Hemisphere. In hindsight, those paradoxes question the extent to which the current Bible translation efforts are effectively furthering World Christianity.

1. **Weak impact**

“One reason why it is considered that the Christian center of gravity has moved to the Southern hemisphere...is the numerical growth of Christianity in this part of the world. But is there a corresponding growth of Christian values, X-rayed improved communal life or family life?” (Kimbi 2019:17).

It is striking to note that the increase of churches and believers does not necessarily influence the level of corruption, ethnic strife, public morality, and other ills in society. Nominalism seems to be the mark of Christianity. The Church has become an additional institution within African communities, co-existing with pre-Christian religious institutions but having little engagement and interaction with them. Cultural anthropologists state that people are guided by several realities that shape their identity. The outer and visible dimension of a person is his or her behaviour. Less visible are the layers of the values, beliefs, and, ultimately, the worldview that fundamentally guide them. If the impact of the Church remains so weak, it certainly has something to do with the fact that discipleship has remained shallow, often addressing behavioural issues but not diving deep enough to engage values, beliefs, and worldviews. Ultimately, this is a Bible translation issue and, more specifically, a Scripture engagement problem in a “convert” stage of Christianity.
2. **Inadequate contextualisation**

“Could it be seen as a paradox to say that the center of gravity has moved down to Africa (or the global South) in garments (languages) from North/West?” (Kimbi 2019:17).

Christianity continues to expand in the global South and East as an exported product of the North and West. Jenkins (2011:42) notes that in Uganda, Catholics are referred to as *baFaransa* (the French) while Protestants are called *balngerezza* (the English). 13 In the same way, in Muslim and other dominant religion contexts, it is hard to dissociate Christianity from some form of Western culture or ideology. This perception of Christianity reveals the absence or insufficient local theologizing that should result from the advent of the vernacular Scriptures to allow native people to engage their pre-Christian heritage, confront it where appropriate, and redirect it in light of Scriptures in order to further a cultural Christian identity. In hindsight, we observe that theological education in the global South is an extension of whatever is thought and taught in the North and West. Theological institutions have not given any serious consideration to biblical exegesis and mother tongue hermeneutics. 14

These issues that plague the normal growth (in quantity and quality) of the Church in the Southern Hemisphere will not be solved without an appropriate framing of Bible translation to effectively address them. They challenge us all to renounce any form of complacency that might come from our ongoing exuberant achievements, and revisit our assumptions and practices to further a Christianity that is truly at home in all the sociocultural contexts of the world. On a more concrete note, the journey of the Francophone Initiative pictures the issues at stake, building on the realities of a specific context: Francophone Africa.

### 4.3 The Francophone Africa example

Around 2005, Bible agencies in Francophone Africa began a keen reflection on the impact of Bible translation in their region. This was done in light of the

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13 The use of these names does not only point to a historical situation, but reflects more a lack of contextualisation and local theologising that should further effective appropriation of Christianity.

14 The Akrofi-Christaller Institute and Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana constitute the exception in this regard on the African continent.
reported growth of the Church in Africa by several historians of Christianity.\textsuperscript{15} While they acknowledged a remarkable expansion of the Church, they also realised that this growth had little to do with the advent of translated Scriptures. Indeed, Bibles, and especially New Testaments, have been translated in several languages of the region. But truth be told, the scope of their use by individuals and churches was rather parochial or limited. Communities took pride in the availability of Scriptures in their languages, but these Scriptures often sat on the shelves. In response to this situation, SIL, United Bible Societies (UBS), Wycliffe, and the Regional Fellowship of Evangelical Students initiated a conversation on this reality with the administrative and thought leadership of the Church in the area. This included prominent Francophone theologians and theological educators. Since 2007, the group has held several consultations which have gradually unveiled the key issues that plague the impact of Bible translation in the region. In the meantime, the awareness of the issues has triggered the start of an indigenous response.

1. The state of vernacular use in the Church in Francophone Africa

In the Declaration found in the proceedings of the first consultation held in 2007, Church leaders, theologians, and Bible translators acknowledged that the Church had undermined the use of the vernacular, favouring the use of French. They affirmed that theology always informs Bible translation, which in turn furthers the development of theology. Hence, they realised that Bible translation and vernacular use had been the catalyst of the sustainable growth of the Church throughout its entire history. Yet, Bible translation was not part of the curriculum of seminaries and theological institutions in Africa.

As a result, theological educators invited Bible agencies to collaborate with them to reverse the situation by creating a course that would allow the introduction of Bible translation and vernacular use in seminaries and theological institutions. Acting in response to this request, Bible agencies (UBS, SIL, and Wycliffe) teamed up with the Council of Theological Institutions in Francophone Africa to develop a response in the form of an introductory course (Kenmogne 2009:219). Since the

\textsuperscript{15} Jenkins speaks to the growth of the Church in Africa and the global South in his book \textit{The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity} (2002:2): “Over the past century, however, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably Southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” He goes on to mention “church growth in modern Africa, where the number of Christians increased, staggeringly, from 10 million in 1900 to 360 million by 2000,” and then extrapolates that there will be 633 million Christians in Africa by 2025 (2002:3–4).
release of this book in 2009, seminars have been organised periodically to equip the faculty of theological institutions to become instructors of this new course. To date, about fifty-four theological institutions and Bible schools across Francophone Africa have been teaching this course, and the book is in its third reprint.

2. **The impact of theology on the faith of ordinary believers**
   A second consultation was held in 2011 that pinpointed the core issue that hinders the effective appropriation of Christianity in Africa. It noted that academic theology and grassroots theology operate in parallel on the continent, without any interaction between them. The first is a mere calque of Western theology and fails to address the deeply felt and cultural issues of Africans.\(^\text{16}\) As a result, Christians live with a fractured identity or “religious schizophrenia” (Walls, quoted by Coulibaly 2012:53). The grassroots theology develops among ordinary believers and often lacks adequate insights into Scriptures. Hence it often easily errs on the side of being more informed by African traditional religions. In a well-documented study, Rubin Pohor (2012) demonstrated that the majority of evangelical believers on the continent revert to pre-Christian religious solutions when confronted with life-threatening issues. This consultation raised awareness that the Christian faith will not mature on the continent without an appropriate engagement of the Bible with African cultural realities. This is needed to further a true conversion whereby people assume their Christian identity within their cultural heritage, honouring the latter as appropriate and adhering faithfully to Scriptures. It was agreed that the availability and effective use of Scriptures in the native languages is a non-negotiable prerequisite for this to happen.

3. **Christianity and cultural realities in Africa**
   In light of the preceding consultation, the group decided in 2015 to consider the delicate issue of contextualisation. They acknowledged that a denial of pre-Christian heritage and an adherence to it equally hinders the ability of the Christian faith to be at home in a context. In response to that realisation, theologians, church leaders, and Bible translators decided to create a framework and suggest methods and examples of contextualisation that would allow everyone to navigate this delicate issue (Pohor and Kenmogne 2017). For the past six years, the issue has been the main concern of theological educators, church leaders, and Bible

\(^{16}\) A leading theologian gave testimony of his inability to address the spiritual issues and questions of African believers, despite his exceptional credentials and his theological education ministry. See Pohor (2012:54).
translators. At the most recent consultation held in 2019, seminary students, theologians, and Bible translators shared their research and learnings on various topics within specific contexts.\(^{17}\)

All in all, the Francophone Initiative journey has allowed Bible translation to move from a place of isolation and to enter the main concerns of the evangelical Church in Francophone Africa. In the meantime, the production of various books on relevant issues at an affordable cost allows the spread of ideas within seminaries, churches, and Bible agencies.

### 4.4 Some results of the Francophone Initiative

An extensive evaluation of the impact of the Francophone Initiative was carried out in 2021. While there is still much to accomplish, there is much to celebrate. The following three stories indicate that there is an ongoing process of ownership of the Christian faith on the continent, furthering a true World Christianity.

1. **A theologian turned into an independent Bible translator**

   Prof. Koulagna is a professor of biblical exegesis and a specialist of Hebrew and biblical philology. He was part of the Francophone Initiative journey from the start while he taught at and led the Lutheran Seminary in Cameroon (*L’Institut luthérien de théologie de Meiganga*). A few years ago, he moved to Morocco where he became the Dean of another theological institution. When he invited me for coffee recently during the conference of the Council of Theological Institutions in Francophone Africa, I expected an ordinary time of catching up with one another. Instead, he pulled out of his suitcase several books of the Bible that he had translated on his own into *Yağ Dii*, his mother tongue.\(^{18}\) Lutheran Bible Translators missionaries completed a New Testament into this language and laid a good foundation for ongoing language work several years ago. On his own, Prof. Koulagna has translated most of the Old Testament books which he prints and ships to the Church in his community for their use. The restrictions of the ongoing pandemic on his ability to travel have only

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\(^{17}\) Ethnicity and African traditional religions constitute the two major issues that hinder the effective growth of the Church (see Kenmogne and Pohor 2021).

\(^{18}\) Professor Jean Koulagna has translated the following works into his mother tongue, *Yağ Dii*: Psalms (1994; 2019); Luther’s *Small Catechism with Explanation* (2011; 2018); *Leviticus* (2019); 1–2 Samuel (2020); 1–2 Kings (2020); Jeremiah and Lamentations (2020) and Ezekiel and Daniel (2021) (see https://almowafaqa.academia.edu/JeanKoulagna/Bible-translation and https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Koulagna).
increased his productivity. As he left the conference, he was headed to his native Dii community, where he spends his vacations teaching in the Church and promoting the use of his native language. From my observation, he and a few others are following the patterns of the church reformers who translated and used the Scriptures in their ministry because they were convinced that it is the way to establish lay people in the Christian faith. Prof. Koulagna made the following statements that reveal his deepest motivation: “Just as it is possible to evangelise without christianising, it is possible to dialogue with traditional religions without falling into paganism” (Kenmogne and Pohor 2021:105, author’s translation). Prof. Koulagna finds in God’s introduction of himself to Moses—“I am who I am” or “I will be what I will be”—the deepest rationale for translation. God does not have a set and fixed name, but he reveals himself to people as God—“Dieu,” “Zamba,” “Nyangbe,” etc.—depending on their languages. This entails God relying on Bible translation to make himself known to the peoples of the world.

2. **A new degree at the Shalom Evangelical School of Theology in Chad**

The seminary in Chad was part of the Francophone Initiative journey from the outset. Having taught the introductory course in Bible translation to several batches of students, they felt that they should make a deeper commitment to further the effective incarnation of the Gospel in their country. In 2016, they held a consultation with church denominations in Chad and advocated for the start of a new degree programme in Theology and African Languages. Unlike their traditional programmes that prepare people for pastoral ministry, this degree equips students for various ministries using their mother tongue: translation, preaching, counselling, literacy, teaching, etc. At the school’s invitation, SIL staff in the region have contributed to the programmes by teaching literacy and linguistics courses. To date, the first batch of graduates is already in the field of ministry. They serve as ordinary pastors within their denominations with the added value that they are skilled to address the pre-Christian worldview issues for which their predecessors were ill-equipped. When I met the Dean of this seminary at the recent conference of the Council of Theological Institutions, he proudly informed me that two graduates of this programme had initiated the translation of the Old Testament in one of the Chadian languages, under the auspices of the Church.

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19 In French, *Faculté de Théologie Evangélique Shalom* (FATES).

20 The language called Mango had the New Testament completed a few years ago through the collaboration of Wycliffe and SIL in Chad.
3. **A champion of engagement with African culture and religions**

Augustin Ahoga is an Old Testament and Cultural Anthropology scholar. In 2020 at the South African Theological Seminary, he defended a history-making thesis that proposes a new framework for inter-religious dialogue (see Ahoga 2020). Years ago, Ahoga was stunned by the fragmentation of the various expressions of the Church within his ethnic group in Benin. The absence of dialogue and unity among them weakened their witness in a community where they were ill-equipped to engage and evangelise the adherents of the traditional voodoo religion. Reviewing the various methods and frameworks for inter-religious dialogue suggested by Western scholars, he did not find anything that was suitable for engaging the challenge of his own community.

Ahoga had been a participant in the Francophone Initiative from its start, and had strengthened his convictions about the use of mother tongue and translated Scripture in ministry. Hence, he took a full year to regain his confidence in the use of his own mother tongue (Maxi) and challenge the denomination to which he belongs to adopt the use of the vernacular for ministry among ethnic groups.

As Ahoga could not find any suitable framework to address the plight of the Church among his ethnic group, he began to explore an approach to dialogue based on “language” and “identity.” Testing this approach within his ethnic community, the divided expressions of the Church identified a common foundation on these realities and went on to reduce the barriers that had kept them separate. Moreover, language and identity provided church denominations with a common ground upon which they could engage the voodoo adherents with the Gospel.

Beyond his own community, Ahoga has tested his approach in other contexts where he has observed its problem-solving efficiency and ability to further the advent of a Church that has a relevant witness in context. In a recent interview, Ahoga (2021) asserted the following: Jews who have acknowledged and followed Jesus Christ call themselves “Messianic Jews” because they do not dispose of their religious and cultural background. In the same way, he works for a day when “African Christians” will emerge who retain and use their relevant cultural values to live out their faith in Jesus Christ. Today, Ahoga’s ministry is shaped by the strong convictions that he holds.

A. He carries out an itinerant theological teaching ministry in several countries including Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Senegal. In all these seminaries, he shares his discoveries and prepares pastors-in-training for a ministry that will allow them to achieve effective
engagement of the Church with any sociocultural context where it serves.

B. In his ministry, Ahoga has observed that oral communities learn and experience transformation when they can see and interact with new information rather than simply hear about it. As a result, he has changed his method of preaching. He has established drama groups that act the Scriptures in the vernacular language in place of reading the passage. Then his sermon is essentially interactive and becomes a conversation with the people. As a result, God’s Word is able to enter the daily realities of people and invite their most sincere response.

C. Ahoga has recently created an interdisciplinary research laboratory21 where several African theologians are teaming up with him to pursue strategies for effective ministry in context. Moreover, young researchers who are involved in post-degree programmes in universities are also welcome. The main prerequisite for admitting them is a good command of their own mother tongue and a commitment to interact with the Gospel and cultural realities in context.

In light of the Walls and Sanneh framework on the transmission and reception of the Gospel, it is obvious that the efforts of the Francophone Initiative aim to establish a local agency whereby people engage their own cultural realities to discern, chastise, confront, or affirm them as appropriate in order to further a true appropriation of the Gospel. In this way, they clearly exemplify the reality of the fact that world evangelisation is shifting from a “proselyte” to a “convert” stage to further the advent of Christianity as a world religion. Therefore, it is appropriate to reconsider our central question: to what extent does our current Bible translation movement further a World Christianity? In the concluding implications that follow, I sketch some of the perspectives that can guide our translation practices in this regard.

5 Implications for the translation practice in the twenty-first century

The perspectives that I suggest are motivated by a desire to see our ongoing exuberant Bible translation movement bear its intended fruit. If Bible translation and engagement preserve the essence of Christianity and catalyse its ability to be at home in every context, how should our practices

21 In French, Laboratoire interdisciplinaire de recherches endogènes (LIRE).
maximise the likelihood of our desired impacts in a post-missionary era and “convert” stage of world evangelisation? The implications suggested here build upon the foundational assumptions that were laid out in my paper “Translation in the twenty-first century: Who needs Scripture?” (presented at the Bible Translation Conference 2019 and published as Kenmogne 2020). Moreover, they consider the shifts in the key factors that guided translation in the missionary era and invite us to reconsider how we respond to those changes. The following implications are considered from the perspective of my own background as a native speaker of a minority language, an observer of the Francophone Initiative development, and a leader in the global Bible translation movement. In retrospect, these implications should inform the orientation and training of those who participate in the various aspects of BT to enable appropriate practices in the current era of World Christianity.

We are indeed privileged to live in the era of the greatest, unprecedented acceleration of Bible translation in history. Technology and artificial intelligence give us the promise that this acceleration could scale exponentially higher in the near future. There is cause for rejoicing. In the meantime, we must seriously ask ourselves what the result of these translations will be. The Francophone Initiative experience, among other realities around the world, indicates that a translation product alone does not necessarily achieve the desired impact. Yet I assume that we are not just concerned about productivity but more so about fruitfulness. If we agree with Walls and Sanneh that the transformational impact that results from translation is a multigenerational and even multidimensional process, we should keenly discern how we engage the various factors that inform and shape Bible translation in this “convert” stage of world evangelisation.

5.1 Multilingualism and the shifting status of vernacular languages

The processes of colonisation (introducing foreign languages), nation-building (adopting official languages for government and education), and today’s globalisation (with rising urbanisation, diaspora movements, and technological innovations) have the cumulative impact of shifting the status of the minority languages of the world. Multilingualism, translanguaging (mixing of different languages that gives rise to new varieties of language), and language loss become important realities that the Bible translation movement neglects to its own peril. A few decades ago, ethnic identity was naturally equated with the ability to speak or use one’s native language. But such is no longer always the case. As I have indicated in Kenmogne (2020), our failure to address the issue of multilingualism and language loss might cause us to translate Bibles for communities that no longer exist, turning the plight of “Bible-less peoples” into that of “people-less Bibles.”
In consultation with the Church and speech communities, multilingualism invites us to keenly 1) discern the Scripture needs of the community based on its multilingualism situation; 2) identify the appropriate Scripture formats (print, oral, audio-visual), modality (mono or bilingual), and scope (portions, New Testament, full Bibles); and 3) establish the mechanisms and strategies that will allow translation to improve the vitality and viability of the minority languages in the process.

In a recent joint endeavour, SIL, UBS, and Seed Company have developed a Multilingualism Assessment Tool that can guide any church, agency, or community in undertaking a Bible translation with greater intentionality by addressing the issues above. The tool identifies four major types of multilingualism situations around the world today, provides simple guidance into the appropriate discernment of Scripture needs, and positions native speakers to be the primary decision makers. In a post-missionary context, where the primary agent of Bible translation is the native speaker, many have concluded that language issues become irrelevant in translation because native speakers have the intuitive and implicit knowledge of their language. The truth of the matter is that linguistics and language issues remain important, although they change in nature. The question is not primarily about how much analytical description of the language should precede or inform Bible translation. Instead, the question is: What kind of linguistics do native speakers need in order to effectively translate Scriptures and maintain ongoing use of their languages?

5.2 Bible translation and the Church

Two centuries of modern missions have resulted in a worldwide presence and exceptional growth of the Church in the Southern Hemisphere. While Bible translation catalysed evangelisation in the early days of this mission, Bible translation and the Church have not walked hand-in-hand, especially after the independence of many churches initiated by Western mission agencies. The Church has spread around the world using foreign languages (colonial or other regional languages of wider communication). Therefore, there is a gap between the presence of the Church and the ability to engage people in the languages that are most meaningful to them. Let me highlight three issues for our consideration relative to the relationship of Bible translation and the Church.

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22 The Multilingualism Assessment Tool considers four types of multilingualism situations: basic, shifting, shifted, and complex. It provides guidance on how to identify them and draw the implications for Scripture translation. It is soon to be published on the website https://emdc.info.
1. **Unchecked assumptions regarding the Church**

As I contrast the Francophone Initiative experience with most of the discourse that is prevalent within the Bible translation movement, there is a need to check our assumptions about the Church. In several parts of the Southern Hemisphere, Bible translation has not been perceived as part of the responsibilities of the Church denominations. However, there is an ongoing assumption that Church planting agencies and churches themselves have the vision and the capacity to carry out translation. Indeed, there are examples of denominations that have taken responsibility for Bible translation in a number of countries around the world. However, no keen participant can deny the amount of support and equipping through capacity building that they have needed.\(^2^3\) I applaud such moves and suggest that we reconsider how we seek to restore the role of the Church in Bible translation.

2. **Restoring the role of the Church in Bible translation**

In response to the growing potential of the Church to both participate in and lead in Bible translation, several voices have risen to advocate for the shift of the leadership from Bible agencies to denominations and Church planting agencies. The Francophone Initiative, the Last Command Initiative in India, and other ongoing endeavours in Indonesia provide enough evidence that the Church’s recognition of its responsibility and its participation has obvious benefits. It harnesses the potential of the Church to contribute to translation and changes the nature of the relationship with agencies without suppressing it. However, in the process, polarities have been introduced to the Bible translation movement that might—in the longer term—be of disservice to the entire

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\(^{2^3}\) In 2017, a pastor of a church denomination in an urban setting in Madagascar noted the weak engagement of believers with God’s Word in the official language. Having taken linguistic courses in the university earlier on, he decided to find out if the use of the mother tongues of church adherents would make a difference. Although the denomination was multilingual, he decided to translate Scripture passages every Sunday into each of the languages present. Very soon, he noted a new enthusiasm in church participation and engagement with God’s Word. He went on to invite SIL to assist him to create full translations into the various languages spoken by the members of the congregation. They recruited dozens of speakers per language who received training in translation principles, and then went on to draft the NT, each in their own language. Over the first year, each of the four teams completed a full draft of the NT. Since then, SIL has been doing quality checking with them. In the process, the congregation has identified degree holders in theology and linguistics who understudy the translation consultants in order to lead the next translations.
cause. Concepts of “church-driven,” “church-centric,” “church vs. agency-led” inadvertently position Bible agencies and churches in a power play which is counterproductive in a missio dei economy.

3. **Acknowledge the reality of unchurched Bible translation contexts**

In light of the growth of the Church around the world, the default strategies and frameworks for Bible translation in the twenty-first century assume the participation of some local expression of the Church. While this is appropriate, we should not lose sight of the significant remaining contexts around the world where no known or visible witness of some expression of the Church is present. In 2019, Ted Bergman and Maik Gibson (personal communication) identified five main areas of concentration of such communities. Using EGIDS level 6b and above, coupled with Joshua Project criteria, they identified more than three hundred communities (including about fifty Sign Language communities) that are still unreached. The following table shows their distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of concentration of unchurched communities</th>
<th>Number of languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asia (India, Afghanistan, Pakistan...)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahel Region</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>352</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can note that these unchurched communities are located in regions of the world where other religions are dominant and access is politically constrained and restricted. Therefore, the prevailing strategies that assume the leading role of a local expression of the Church will not necessarily prove effective in these contexts. Instead, they will require cross-cultural and creative pioneering engagements that allow Bible translation alongside church planting to lay a solid foundation for the ongoing and multigenerational transformation of the communities.

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24 They judged a community to have no church if the number for Christian adherents is less than twenty-one. Note that this arbitrary number is simply a cut-off point for the purposes of counting. Put differently, there is no biblical or missiological basis for setting it.
5.3 The corpus and purpose of Bible translation

Bible translation happens increasingly in contexts where people already have communicative access to Scriptures. Yet, the orientation of Bible translation often aims to simply introduce the concepts of Christianity, as in a pioneering context. As argued in Kenmogne 2020, it is my view that Bible translation serves the purposes of evangelism in the regions of the world that are still unchurched or without a Gospel witness. However, where a Church is already established, Bible translation should essentially aim to further spiritual maturity, theological formation, and identity affirmation. Recalling Walls’ framework, these translations are happening in a “convert” stage where “proselytes” are seeking to resolve the issues of their cultural and Christian identities in order to mature as believers. Are our translations carried out with such an expectation in mind? Do our translation outcomes or products allow their end users to address such needs?

As a speaker of a minority language who first received the Gospel in a foreign language, it has been my experience that I need the mother tongue Scriptures to find the categories that allow me to engage the pre-Christian beliefs, values, and worldview that shaped me in my upbringing. In this way, translation assists me in my discipling process as I seek to mature as a believer and gain the ability to discern my Christian faith and cultural identity so as to achieve harmony. However, it has also been my experience that, often, the translated Scriptures available in my mother tongue do not help me much in this endeavour.²⁵ Bible agencies seem to take a minimalist approach relative to the deliverables of their work. The translation process is indeed a major theological enterprise during which translators explore concepts and reflect on the worldview, beliefs, values, and customs of the people. The outcomes of such an important work are seldom documented, yet it is of primary essence to the native speaker who already has communicative access to God’s Word in a different language. In fact, such information would help to achieve the purpose of translation in this “convert” season where proselytes are seeking effective appropriation of the Gospel. A Ghanaian theologian who explores mother tongue

²⁵ In a paper where I explored a traditional and religious institution that has hindered the growth of the Church in my homeland, I realised that the Ghomala’ New Testament offered a concept that could equip the Church to find ways to engage this institution and reorient it to serve God’s Kingdom. Yet the completed translation presented to me as a user offers little assistance in negotiating the application of Scripture to challenging cultural realities (see Kenmogne 2021).
hermeneutics once expressed to me a similar disappointment with the vernacular translations. He wondered where the translators document the theological decisions they make when choosing how to express concepts during the translation process. Exploring Scripture in my own mother tongue, I have been convinced that for the translations to advance effective discipleship and theological formation, we should reconsider the corpus of the deliverables of a Bible translation to include, besides the Scripture translation, a documentation of key theological decisions made regarding issues that have worldview and cultural implications. This requirement has significant implications on the translation process itself, construing it as a theological exercise that effectively engages the language and the culture to accurately convey God’s Word.

5.4 The status of the Bible translator

In a recent paper on the “Centring the Local,” Jay Matenga writes:

I am lobbying for a return to indigeneity and a discarding of contextualisation in its impositional and cognitively-bound form. The gospel is not a set of cognitive concepts that are translated into another culture from the outside by expatriate missionaries. It is a narrative of God’s faithfulness emerging out of the experience and ways of knowing of those who come to know Christ within a particular context. It is first and foremost a spiritual relationship that grows, guided by Scripture. By labelling it indigenous, I am joining a long line of so-called “Majority World” theologians arguing for a recentering of the local experience and localised interpretation of that experience in-Christ (Matenga 2021).

In response to the rise of the Global Church, the Bible translation movement strives to find ways to achieve effective local agency in Bible translation in each context around the world. The adoption of the Common Framework as its modus operandi by the Every Tribe Every Nation alliance indicates a keen desire to see people from the receptor community play a leading role in the translation process. There is much to celebrate in this regard. However, there is still a long way to go, as Matenga goes on to write:

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26 Theologian Tetteh Laryea delights in theologizing in the Ga language of Ghana. He laments over the fact that Bible translations lack helpful hints that can assist people like him or other mother tongue speakers who deeply desire to reflect upon the Scriptures in their sociocultural context. His book Yesu Homoyo Nuntso [Jesus, Lord of Homowo] (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2004) is an excellent exploration of Christology in the Ga language, with only an epilogue in English.
Centring the local is not about empowering them. To empower, you give power to. It is not yours, as an outsider, to give. Rather than empower, we need to take our power out of the equation to create space for local initiatives to emerge (2021).

The ministry of Bible translation is going indigenous in the Southern Hemisphere, but its resourcing is still largely found in the global North. From observation, the dynamics of the interaction between the various players does not create enough space for global South scholars to release their full potential in this ministry. We need more and more theological and church leaders who can effectively embrace Bible translation as part of their pastoral or theological ministry to the Church. For this, we will need to revisit some of our ongoing practices. This includes: 1) all those participating in the missio dei through Bible translation—whether in resourcing, or in technical or implementation roles—need to give away their power and set their focus on the goal; 2) unlock Bible translation as an exclusive and specialised field and consider creative ways that allow cooperation with all initiatives in translation that spark from various places;27 and 3) clearly frame Bible translation as a theological enterprise to advance evangelism, discipleship, theological formation, and identity affirmation.

With these changes we would increase the likelihood of Christianity being at home in most contexts around the world because people are truly flourishing, meaning they are restored in their dignity as individuals and communities, and in their relationships with God, with their fellow human beings, and with God’s creation.

6 Conclusion

The fast-globalising world of the twenty-first century tends to lock the whole of humanity into an “imagined” (Anderson 2006) and artificial community that reduces cultural and linguistic diversity. In light of the prevailing trends, we need to recapture the deepest raison-d’être of Bible translation if we want to maintain our motivation and relevance. Sanneh reminds us that Bible translation is the irreplaceable ingredient that preserves the essence of Christianity as a religion without a fixed language or cultural centre, which seeks to be at home in any and in every sociocultural context. Therefore, as we pursue Bible translation in a period that has been preceded by two centuries of Western modern mission, our

27 Specialists and trained experts in BT are indeed in high demand in the emerging and crowded field of participants in BT. Their expertise coupled with soft and relational skills that allow appropriate engagement will maximise their impact when they see their main contribution as facilitators rather than primary implementers.
duty is to revisit our assumptions and practices to ensure that they enable and support the recipients of the Gospel around the world in their processes to confront, adapt, affirm, and reorient their pre-Christian cultural norms to allow for a true appropriation of Christianity. This will give meaning to our efforts and further the glory of God as individuals, communities, and nations flourish because they have achieved full reconciliation with God, with themselves, with others, and with God’s creation.
References


