
From Translation to Effective Communication¹

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1. Introduction

In the last thirty years or so, one concern has brought about great changes in Bible translation work—the concern for communication. It has resulted in such new approaches to translation as dynamic equivalence (Nida and Taber 1969), idiomatic translation (Beekman and Callow 1974), and meaning-based translation (Larson 1984). Literacy efforts and work in the area of Scripture Use have sprung from the same source.

This concern about the communicative effectiveness of translated Scripture is one of the most important and also most encouraging developments in Christian work in recent decades because it puts the emphasis where it belongs. As Christians we have a message that we must communicate. There is no “making of disciples of all nations” without communication; Paul himself put it in a nutshell in his famous passage in Romans 10.13b-15 “every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!’” (RSV). Paul epitomized the idea of successful communication in the concept of preaching which, in its widest sense, is simply the proclamation of the Good News. If then, communication takes a central place in our Christian work, then it certainly seems part of our responsibility that we try to do our best at this job.

It is the purpose of this paper to take a fresh look at some of the efforts that have been made in Bible translation circles to communicate biblical truths effectively, with the goal of arriving at constructive proposals that may help us to develop ways of reaching the people even more effectively with the Good News.^{2†}

¹ This article is a revision of: Ernst-August Gutt. ‘From Translation to Effective Communication’ *Notes on Translation*, Volume 2 No. 1 (1988):24-40

² I am fully aware that our efforts do not depend on effective communication strategies alone; the very next verse in the quote from Romans given above shows that. (Cf. also 1 Cor 2:1-5.) At the same time, there are ways of making our communication ineffective or of lessening its effectiveness unnecessarily,

2. The situation at present

This cannot be anything but a very brief sketch about translating the texts of the Scriptures into the target languages around the world. This approach has sometimes been referred to as a “Bible translation strategy” (for example, in Dye 1980)—communicating the message of Scripture to the Receptor Language (RL) audiences. Thus, apart from actual translations, simplified Scripture materials such as Bible stories and abridgments are often also produced, especially in the early stages of a project and in situations where people are not very familiar with the contents of the Bible. In such situations another kind of literature has also been produced—booklets about Bible background, which are short presentations of some of the geographical, cultural, and historical facts of the biblical times. Another product, actually an activity, that was brought into focus by Dye (op. cit.), is that of engaging in “Good News encounters.” Bible studies and biblical teaching (apart from that going on at the translation desk) has also been done by some translators.

Equipped with this “toolbox,” the translator approaches his or her task, starting, for example, with Bible stories and abridgments, then beginning the *real* translation task and, depending on the situation and his or her personality, engaging in Good News Encounters and perhaps some biblical teaching. He also begins to think, hopefully early in the work, about how to get the RL people to use what is being produced. I hope that this is a fairly accurate, though certainly sketchy, summary of the situation.

3. Requirements for effective communication

Now let us step back for a moment and look at the task of communication from a little distance, asking ourselves especially about what makes for effective communication. There is, of course, a host of factors one could mention—ranging from the quality of the orthography used to national language policies—but I want to pick out one factor, the central importance of which has only recently begun to be discussed in any detailed way, and that is *relevance*. What is particularly interesting about this factor is that it has come into focus independently from two different sides at about the same time: from the side of communication theory through the work of Wilson and Sperber (1981, 1986; Sperber and Wilson 1985, 1986), and from the side of practical field research through Dye’s *The Bible Translation Strategy* (op. cit.).

Beginning with the practical side, Dye carried out a survey of 15 Bible translation projects in different parts of the world, trying to assess their spiritual impact on the RL audience and to identify factors that could be seen as influencing that impact. He discovered a number of factors that showed a correlation with the spiritual impact, but he found that there is “one factor above all others which seemed to make the difference between much fruit and little fruit, between a strong, growing church and a weak, struggling one” (op.cit., 39). This factor is what Dye calls

and I think we are responsible for removing unnecessary blocks in the way so that people will understand the truth.

“principle of personal relevance”: “People respond to the gospel in proportion to their conviction that God and His Word are relevant to the concerns of daily life” (ibid.). Dye adds that this should be read as a description of “the way the sovereign Holy Spirit usually chooses to work” (ibid.).

It is fascinating to note that, from the viewpoint of communication theory, Sperber and Wilson arrive at very similar insights. According to their “relevance theory” of communication, the success of a communication event depends crucially on how well one principle has been observed: the principle of relevance. This principle is believed to be part of our human psychological make-up. In normal communication, the speaker tries to express himself in such a way that the hearer gets the benefit of “adequate context” modification at the cost of “minimal processing” effort, as much as is possible under the given circumstances. “Context,” here, is a technical, psychological notion: the context a person brings to a communication event is the sum total of the information available to him at that time (from memory and from perception), and for any text or utterance to be relevant at all in a given context, it is required that this context, that is, the information the hearer possesses at that time, gets modified by the communication event.

What is meant by context modification? Context modification accounts for our intuition that communication has succeeded when one has got to know something of interest. It is not sufficient for the information one gets to be new—someone may tell me something about the latest developments of the stock exchange that I knew nothing about, but his communication would still fail if I have no interest whatsoever in that sort of thing. Relevance theory captures this intuition by defining context modification not in terms of simply adding information but in terms of “contextual implications,” which follow neither from the text or utterance alone nor from the context alone but only from an inferential combination of the two. Thus, if an act of communication is to succeed, the speaker must express himself in such a way that the hearer will be able to find the right speaker-intended context, combine it inferentially with the text or utterance given, and draw contextual implications from this combination.

But note that the principle of relevance says more than this: context modification alone is not enough; it must be brought about relatively at minimal processing cost, that is, without putting the hearer to unnecessary effort. What does this “processing cost” depend on? Essentially, it depends on two factors: the linguistic complexity of the text or utterance and on the accessibility of the desired context. The first factor is obvious enough, but the second may need some comment. It is based on the insight that, of the vast amount of information available to a person, for example, all the knowledge and experience he has stored in his memory, only a small portion is readily available at any given point in time, and this portion varies from occasion to occasion. Thus, at this moment, the information of the last sentence you read is probably highly accessible to you (unless you skipped it), but you may have problems recalling all those you invited to your tenth birthday party. You may be able to access this latter information, too, but probably only after some hard thinking, that is, after spending a fair amount of processing effort.

How crucial it is to access the speaker-intended context rather than some other part of the context can be seen from the following simple example:

(1) Susan phones Bill: “Darling, Smiths said we can borrow their lawn mower till ours is fixed. Would you mind getting it from them tonight on your way home?”

As it happens, there are two Smith families in town whom they know, the Jack Smiths and the Robert Smiths. Since Bill has just been talking with someone about Robert Smith, he immediately thinks of that family. However, it is actually the Jack Smiths who agreed to loan their lawn mower, and so Bill’s visit to the Robert Smiths later that day causes some confusion!

Relevance theory accounts for this little incident in the following way: As part of processing Susan’s utterance, Bill had to identify the reference of the proper noun, Smiths; in accordance with the principle of relevance, his mind automatically turned to the most easily available contextual information, which happened to be about Robert Smith, and apparently there was nothing inconsistent with other knowledge about this referent that would have caused problems with this interpretation. Susan, of course, had the other Smith family in mind, and she did not realize that Bill had just been talking about the Robert Smiths. Otherwise she would probably have expressed herself differently, identifying the referent more unequivocally.

This little example shows, from reference assignment, what can happen when the hearer does not have the speaker-intended context readily available. He will supply some other context, and hence misunderstand the communication.³ Another possible consequence can be that none of the contextual information the hearer has at hand seems to fit; in that case he may find that the utterance “does not make sense,” and he may either ask for further clarification or just ignore it, that is, stop the communication process.

It is not difficult to see that there are strong links between Dye’s findings concerning the Bible translation strategy and the insights of relevance theory if we consider the following.

Let us start by asking ourselves what happens when a text that was written by its author for audience A gets delivered to audience B, different from A. In conformity to the principle of relevance, the author had adapted what he wrote optimally to the context he assumed to be readily available to his target audience. The communicative success or failure of this text with audience B will, therefore, crucially depend on how different the two audiences are from each other. Of course, this is not what we usually do in communication. Usually we produce a modified or new text made to suit the context of the new audience.

An excellent example of the degree of change that may be necessary, even between two contemporary audiences of the same general cultural area and speaking the same language, is

³ Relevance theory shows that not only reference assignment, as in this example, but disambiguation, interpretation of nonliteral speech forms (irony, metaphor, etc.) and other aspects of utterance interpretation depend crucially on the identification of the right context.

the relation between Paul's synagogue sermon in Antioch (Acts 13.16–41) and his Areopagus speech (Acts 17.22–31).⁴ While Paul's basic message on both occasions was the same, "Believe in Jesus Christ and be saved," the two speeches differ greatly in information content: the one quoting freely from the Old Testament, the other lacking any such quotation but referring to secular Greek literature instead. As an experienced orator, Paul knew intuitively that this content adaptation was crucial for any prospect of success with this audience.⁵

So given that the success of a communication event crucially depends on the adaptation of its content to the target audience, it is not hard to see that translation will often be heading for communicative trouble. With all the variety of approaches used in translation, they all firmly hold that the content of the text must not be changed in the process of translation. There is probably no translation theorist, however idiomatic or dynamic his views might be, who would endorse *translation* adaptations as diverse as those found between the two speeches of Paul referred to above. And yet, clearly, the differences between the audiences called for such content adaptations: no degree of formal, linguistic change could have made, for example, the synagogue sermon successful on the Areopagus.

Considering now that in Bible translation we are taking the same texts that were written for audiences two thousand or more years ago in a particular corner of the world and presenting them to audiences today, ranging from industrial societies to forest hunters in a jungle somewhere *without content adaptation*, it should not come as a surprise at all that we encounter not only marginal but *serious* communication problems. This is just a necessary outworking of the way we are made, of the way we, as human beings, handle communication. The difficulties these different RL audiences often face today when presented with translated Scripture are basically violations of the principle of relevance: because the biblical texts were written primarily for audiences with a very different contextual background, the RL audience often cannot easily see "... that God and His Word are relevant to the concerns of daily life," to put it in Dye's words (*loc. cit.*).

At this point relevance theory can help us to avoid a misunderstanding that could otherwise easily arise—the conclusion that if the above is true, then it follows that Scripture is not relevant or, at least, not to all people. This is a fallacy; there is an important difference between a text

⁴ There is little concrete information on the question as to what language was used in the synagogue services. However, R. T. France (personal communication) thinks that it is very possible that the synagogue service in Antioch was held in Greek. Note that nothing crucial for the present argument depends on this issue anyway.

⁵ Some might object, saying that there is an important difference between oral and written communication here, in that oral communication is more dependent on situational context than written communication. It seems to me that this point has not, in fact, so much to do with the oral versus written form of communication as with the homogeneity of the audience assumed. Thus a public, oral communication, like a radio speech, can be much less dependent on an audience than a personal, written piece of communication, like a letter to a close friend. In any case, it should be clear that the differences between the two audiences considered in the example are not situational but religious and cultural.

being irrelevant to an audience and between a text violating the principle of relevance for that audience. A text that is irrelevant to a certain audience is a text that does not yield any contextual implications for that audience, in other words, a text that does not relate to anything in their lives. A text that does not conform to the principle of relevance for a given audience, however, may well yield contextual implications with some part of the context of that audience, but the processing effort required to get that context and its contextual implications is so great that the ordinary individual will not be prepared to make it. Applied to translated Scripture, the truths of Scripture are relevant to all people at all times, but for many of these people, they are not recoverable in conformity to the principle of relevance. This is the basic problem of translated Scripture, even if translated idiomatically. It is a barrier that translation puts up for communication in many RL situations precisely because it is translation, because it has to say the same things to all RL audiences, no matter how different their context may be from that of the original readers of Scripture in New Testament times.

4. Toward more effective communication

What can be done? As I see it, the first prerequisite for an effective solution to this problem is a clear recognition of its true nature and extent. It seems to me that while some progress has been made in this area, the Bible Translation Strategy (BTS), as it is being advocated and practiced, is still in need of more adequate understanding. The development of Scripture Use as a separate concern for the BTS reflects a realisation that idiomatic or dynamic approaches to Scripture translation do not guarantee that such translations will be used by the RL audience. This realisation has led to the study of a variety of factors that seem to influence the use or non-use of translated Scripture. To give just one example, Tripp (1984), identifies ten such factors:

1. Fulfilment of existing religion
2. Motivation to change
3. Confidence in those presenting the message
4. Relevance of the gospel message demonstrated by those who believe it
5. A simplification of the gospel message in the early days for easier understanding
6. Biblical instruction in the vernacular rather than the national language
7. Encouragement and use of local leaders rather than outsiders
8. Adequate degree of fluency of readers
9. Availability of translated Scripture even in provisional form from the early days
10. A degree of church organization to give permanency of opportunity for Scripture use (op. cit. p. 21)

But, as seems typical of the present stage of the Scripture Use movement, there is little recognition that most, if not all, of these factors have one thing in common—they contribute to the fulfilment of the principle of relevance. Let me just sketch this briefly.

Factors 1, 4, and 5 are straightforward applications of the principle of relevance: they have in common that they bring out from Scripture truths that fulfil the principle of relevance for their particular background. Factor 3, confidence in the communicators, to which perhaps also factor 7 is related, follows from another important insight of relevance theory that we have not mentioned yet here and that is the need in communication for the audience to assign a relative truth probability value to the information communicated, that is, for all information perceived, the addressee has to make up his mind as to how likely he thinks that information to be true or reliable. Consequently the credibility of the communicator plays a great role in successful communication.

All the factors considered so far help primarily to bring about a good match between text and context. Some of the other factors listed deal with the reduction of effort involved in processing the communicated material itself. Thus factor 8 shows that communication is dependent on the relative ease with which the medium of communication is handled by the RL audience (here reading skills in the case of printed communication), and factor 6 seems to underline the same point, though here in the area of linguistic competence.

To me this example illustrates that much of the Scripture Use literature is very insightful in identifying a number of different problem areas; where it still needs to develop further is in trying to understand why all these seemingly so different problems have an impact on the communication process. Here relevance theory can help us to get ahead and gain a better understanding of these problems; it can show us that many of these problems stem from a single source—from the relevance gap that exists between the translated Scriptures and the RL audience.

It is probably Dye's study (op. cit.) that comes closest to this recognition when stating that the Principle of Personal Relevance is the single, most influential factor for the spiritual impact of translated Scripture. However, even in Dye's study, the existence of a significant relevance gap for translated Scripture is only *implied*; Dye does not point out that this relevance gap is to be viewed as a *necessary consequence* of the BTS and that, therefore, the choice of translation as its main pillar has definite implications for what kinds of communication problems are to be expected.

It is true that, *in practice*, many of us who are engaged in the BTS have felt these limitations and reacted to them by making some use of non-translational means, such as personal witness, Bible teaching and production of Bible stories and abridgements. However, I think it is safe to say that the use that has been made so far of non-translational means in the BTS framework is still far from making full use of the communicative potential that such means afford, the main reason being, perhaps, an insufficient awareness of the communicative limits of translated materials and of basic principles of communication. Here, then, is the first challenge: to strive for a more adequate understanding of the communication problems inherent in the Bible

translation strategy as a translational approach; we must get a clear view of the relevance gap, and most importantly, we must see that the effective use of the translated Scripture, and hence the main point of our communication effort, is *crucially dependent* on how well we succeed in bridging this gap. This is true of pioneer and church situations alike.

Once we have a greater awareness of the extent of the relevance gap and of its adverse effects on our programs, we may be in a much better position to bridge that gap more effectively. Since the relevance gap arises from a mismatch between the text and the context into which it is placed, it can logically be bridged from two directions: either the text can be adjusted to fit the context, or the context can be adjusted to fit the text. Applied to the task of communicating the biblical message, this means we can either work out texts that communicate biblical truths in a way optimally suited to the RL context, or we can change the context of the RL audience in such a way that they can assimilate the text as it was written by the original writers. A priori there is nothing to force us to choose one of these two ways and to reject the other; each has its own merits and limitations, and they can also be combined in suitable ways. More will be said on this below.

However, before one can apply these solutions, one needs to identify clearly what these areas of contextual mismatch are; in other words, one needs a good knowledge of the differences between the SL context and the RL context. One cannot adapt a message effectively to a context one does not really know, nor can one effectively adapt the context of people one knows little about. To put it in practical terms: One cannot produce communicative materials for people whose background one knows only little about, nor can one teach them effectively, unless one has a good idea of where they are at. Thus the first step toward a more effective communication strategy must be a *careful* study of the cultural background of the RL audience, especially of their religious belief system. Depending on the situation, there may well be cases where there are RL people who are already aware of at least some of the differences between beliefs of the original biblical audience and those held by his own people. Since outsiders, even with extensive systematic investigation, will never get as complete a picture of the RL culture and beliefs as insiders, the involvement of capable RL speakers at this stage is most desirable.

The necessity of a careful and comprehensive study of the RL background and culture has been increasingly recognized in circles concerned with missiology and with matters of contextualisation in particular. I wonder, however, whether anthropology is not an area where there is room for substantial improvement. It is interesting to note the cautious tone in the following statement in a recent publication of *Scripture in Use*: "It may well be that solid ethnological study is in many cases a necessary prelude to a spiritual ministry" (Hale 1984: 4). From the point of view of relevance theory and the principle of relevance, it would be quite clear that solid ethnological study is not only potentially an advantage but really is one of the first preconditions for communicating the biblical truths across language boundaries.

I myself have found the following consideration helpful to get an idea of the relative importance of good anthropological groundwork. Looking at the overall impact of a program in the BTS, we should make clear to ourselves that some inadequacies in our linguistic knowledge of the RL, for example, about some morphological rules of the language, will probably be far less detrimental

to our communication efforts than an inadequate knowledge of the religious beliefs, concerns, and overt and covert spiritual needs of the RL people; misjudgment in this area will almost certainly do considerable damage to our communication efforts. If the RL people cannot see the relevance of the very first products of our work in their own lives, then we may have a hard time getting them interested in any of the further materials. If, on the other hand, our first materials appear to be of high relevance to them, then they will most likely be interested in anything that follows. Please let me add that this is not to belittle the importance of good linguistic work in any way, but only to ask whether, in terms of the overall objective of our programs, we have our priorities always in the right place.

The next step after one has a fairly clear picture of the religious background of the people is for us to set clear communication goals. The emphasis here is on communication, because from my experience while we do have goals they are rarely stated in terms of communication; the usual way in which goals are stated within the BTS approach is (a) in terms of products, that is, in terms of the portions of Scripture to be translated (usually the NT and parts of the OT), and more recently, in terms of (b) getting the products into use, Scripture Use. Neither of these two goals, however, make reference to communicative objectives.

Let me illustrate this. Under the current approach, the goals for some hypothetical RL group could look something like this: Since these people know little about the Bible and since we are just beginning, we start with a Bible story booklet about Jesus; then, since they are animists, we will translate Mark's Gospel and we will also do a Genesis abridgement at the same time. Then we will carry on with Acts, etc., until we get to Revelation. We hope that the RL people directly involved in the translation process will become Christians and will then take an active part in spreading the biblical truths to others. We will also try to meet the people and talk to them about the Bible; once there are Christians, we will start a Bible study group as well.

By contrast, the goals I am envisaging are stated primarily in communication terms. For example, let us assume that the study of the belief system of the people has shown that they live in dependence on tree spirits which they believe are influential in their day-to-day lives. They also believe in a creator-god, in many ways comparable to the God of the Bible, but they assume him to be too remote and distant to be interested in the day-to-day affairs of their lives. Thus one of our goals will be to convey to the people in an effective way the truths that (a) the Creator God does care about the welfare of the people; in fact, he has shown his love by sending his Son into this world to help/save the people; (b) the Creator God is more powerful than the tree spirits; (c) in fact, the Creator God detests and has forbidden the worship of things like tree spirits.

Obviously, this would be just *one* subgoal of the whole project, but I think it serves to show the difference between the two approaches. Note that this approach has the advantage that it can aim directly at matters of highly perceivable relevance and, also, build knowingly on whatever partial agreement there might be between the RL beliefs and those of the Bible (and there will always be some beliefs that are similar, if not the same) and that it can therefore concentrate its energy on how to convey those biblical beliefs not shared by the RL audience.

Once the overall goals have been set, a strategy needs to be developed as to how to reach these goals. Since we are working within the framework of the BTS, translations of the Scriptures will be at the centre of our work. Scripture translations must hold a central position in the life of any Christian community, because the strength of translation is that it overcomes the language barrier for the RL audience, giving them the closest possible access to God's Word in their own language. This is the firm conviction of all of us who adhere to the BTS.

At the same time, from all we have said about effective communication so far, it will be equally clear that the language barrier is not the only one that makes access to God's word difficult for the RL people: there is also the relevance gap that needs to be taken seriously, if the BTS is to be effective. And since translation is bound by its commitment to keep the content of the original Scripture unchanged, other means will be needed to bridge this relevance gap. Thus what the situation requires is not to replace or drop translation work, but to reinforce its impact by embedding it in a wider framework specifically designed to bridge the relevance gap for the RL audience in question. So let us now take a little time to look at this larger framework and look at the approaches it might use, always bearing in mind that these are not to replace translation proper but to supplement it.

As outlined above, there are basically two options open for developing this wider framework: one would consist in *context adaptation* and the other in *text adaptation*. Of course, combinations of the two are possible as well.

Let us turn first to context adaptation. As mentioned above, this means basically some kind of teaching: for example, one would teach the RL audience concepts or information that is necessary for the correct understanding of the biblical text but unavailable to the ordinary member of the RL audience. Thus, the main aim of this approach is to adjust the context available to the RL audience in such a way that it will come to resemble, as closely as possible, that of the audience assumed by the original writer. This is certainly an approach that has been followed by the church throughout its history through the ministry of Bible teachers and pastors as well as through the production of literature of many kinds designed to help the audience understand a given biblical text better. Note that there are two clearly distinct aspects in this context adaptation: as we just said, one aspect is to make available to the RL audience background information necessary for understanding the text.

This alone, however, will not yet be sufficient for successful communication: understanding the historical background of the council of the apostles in Acts 15 will not necessarily show its *personal* relevance for a member of the RL audience. In other words, he may be able to see some of the contextual implications the report of that council had for the original readers, but this will not necessarily yield contextual implications for his *own* context, for that which is uppermost in his mind. Also, the very fact that he first has to *learn*, that is, to *invest effort* in modifying his own context, may cause the processing of this text for him to end in a violation of the principle of relevance. It is for this reason that with the context-adjusting approach it will often not be sufficient just to supply background information that the RL audience lacks, but it may also be necessary to draw out for them implications from the text that *will* meet the principle of relevance for their specific context.

Taking the example of Acts 15, in most RL cultures the question of whether the ordinances of the Jewish law are to be binding for Christians will not be an issue; hence in that particular aspect, what was probably the main point of the original writer for that section, may be of low relevance for the RL group. However, the RL audience might see great relevance in this text as an example of how Christian leaders can settle religious disputes among themselves. Thus supplementary teaching bringing out this point may well be necessary for this text to be appreciated as being of direct relevance to such an RL audience.

The other option is to adapt the text to the RL audience.^{6†} The basic idea here is to present the biblical truths to the RL audience in such a way that it readily links up with the context most accessible to them. Again the crucial starting point here is a good knowledge of the context the RL people have in mind so that one will know what will easily relate to them. Of course, there will be great variety here: each RL group will be different in their beliefs, but also there will be differences in how easily a given part of Scripture relates to their context; if, for example, the beliefs of the RL people about the creation of the world agree in essential points with the biblical account, then very little adaptation of the biblical creation narratives may be necessary for that audience—perhaps they can even assimilate a straightforward translation of these narratives without difficulty. If, however, the RL beliefs differ in essential points, then more adaptation may be needed. The Silt'i people of Ethiopia, for example, apparently perceive creation as referring to the things on the earth, such as plants, animals, and people, rather than the universe as a whole, including the earth itself, the sun, moon and stars. Thus, when dealing with creation story, this was something that puzzled people and we drafted a modified account that made explicit that before creation there was nothing except God himself.

Thus it will be found that text adaptation embraces a wide variety of materials, ranging from near-translational texts to more free presentations of biblical truths, perhaps even including topical combinations of scriptural materials. Of course, such tools are familiar to us, and we may have already used some of them ourselves, such as Bible stories or topical selections of Scripture. My point here, however, is that whatever we produce along these lines must be prepared under strict observation of the principle of relevance relative to this particular RL audience; to do a selection of Bible stories prior to translation just because we believe that generally stories are easier to understand is less than maximally effective; we should first determine carefully which stories will be of highly perceivable relevance to the RL group.

Now an important point here is that for either context adaptation or text adaptation it does not *have* to be the translator himself who plans and prepares such supplementary materials. He may have to do it himself if there is nobody else who could do it; in many situations, however,

⁶ In effect, this is what communicative approaches to translation, such as dynamic equivalence (Nida and Taber 1969) and idiomatic translation (Beekman and Callow 1974) have tried to do within the framework of translation; they incorporate a certain amount of content adaptation to suit the context of the RL audience. However, this has resulted in a compromise that has proved problematic for two reasons: (a) It tends to blur the limits of what translation is, and (b) it still falls short of its declared aim — successful communication. For a more extensive discussion, see Gutt (1985).

we may find that there are others who could take on these tasks, either right away or with some further training. Depending on the situation, local believers, especially church leaders, pastors, or Bible school teachers where such exist, or members of other missions, could well take on this part of the task. However, the translator's help will probably be crucial to make people realize the importance and need of such materials and also to assist them in identifying those areas of high relevance and to choose appropriate forms; it should be noted that this is true not only for missionaries, but also for local Christians who may already have been trained in foreign ways of communicating the biblical truths rather than those appropriate for their own people. Here the translator with his more thorough knowledge of the RL background and his understanding of how communication works can give invaluable guidance, even if he is not producing any of these materials himself. Thus, as I see it, it is part of the translator's responsibility to recognize that the relevance gap is there and needs to be bridged; this follows from his concern and commitment to communicate the truths of Scripture effectively to the RL people; whether he himself will be involved in the actual bridging or not is another matter that will depend on local situations.

Thus, having weighed the advantages and disadvantages of the two basic approaches available in the light of the local situation, the communicator must then decide what use he can make of them in his strategy. As mentioned above, combinations of the two approaches are possible as well.

Note, that so far, little has been said about the *medium* of presentation of the biblical truths: whether they are going to be provided in printed form, in personal interaction (talks, personal witnessing), on cassettes, or by more sophisticated audio-visual means, such as movies or videos. Neither have we said much here about the form of presentation: whether it is to be in prose, poetry, song, drama, or any other literary form. Again, it will be the communicator's task to find those media and forms that are (a) available, (b) appropriate in the situation, and that (c) reduce the processing effort for the RL audience.

The point of appropriateness could be illustrated with many examples, such as the experience of Olson (1973) among the Motilone Indians where he discovered that a personal sharing of the Christian faith was inappropriate to the importance of the message and that the culturally effective way was to have it sung at a certain festival.

Concerning point (c), preparing printed communications for a group that is preliterate implies that they will be able to profit from this communication only after they have mastered the skill of reading-and that, of course, does require a considerable learning effort on the part of the target audience. It will be the communicator's task to assess whether this medium might not effectively block his communication efforts at a given stage in his overall programme and, if necessary, to find an alternative medium.

5. Conclusion

In closing I would like to point out that I am greatly encouraged by much that is taking place in the area of Scripture-in-use. I believe that as the studies and experiments with Scripture-in-use continue, the BTS will succeed more and more in bridging the relevance gap that exists between the translated texts and the RL audience. What I have tried to do in this paper is to show that the insights gained from relevance theory into communication can be of great value in this development. On the one hand, they can help us to recognize more clearly the nature and extent of the communicative limits built into translation; and on the other hand, they can give us valuable guidance in how to overcome these limitations, in order that our main goal, the successful communication of biblical truths to all people, can be reached effectively.

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