

## BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GAP

## BIBLE TRANSLATION AS A CASE IN POINT

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## ABSTRACT

Translation practitioners have always been aware of the fact that translation is not a purely linguistic operation but a means of facilitating communication between members of different cultures. Translation scholars have only recently discovered this fairly obvious aspect of their field - and the functional approach to translation — or skopos theory — was instrumental in turning it into one of the main concerns of modern translation studies. New Testament and early Christian texts refer to a culture from which we are separated by a huge cultural gap. They have been translated and re-translated many times during the past (almost) 2000 years and into almost all languages on the planet. In spite of that, we do not always feel that the cultural gap has really been bridged. Does this justify yet another translation? Together with my husband, Klaus Berger, who is a New Testament scholar at Heidelberg University, I was engaged in a fascinating project: We translated the texts of the New Testament plus a large number of apocrypha from the original Greek (and Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic) into German. It was the first translation of these texts that involved a theologian and a translation scholar, and it was the first translation based on modern functional translation theory. Using a few examples from our translation and comparing them to several translations into other modern languages (such as Afrikaans, English, and French), I would like to show how we went about in order to bridge the cultural gap, making the texts understandable to modern German readers without taking away their strangeness.

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## 1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Professional practitioners of translation have always been aware of the fact that translating is not a purely linguistic operation, but rather a way of facilitating communication between members of different cultures. Translation scholars have only recently discovered this fairly obvious aspect of their field, and the functional approach to translation to which I subscribe, was instrumental in turning it into one of the main concerns of modern translation theory and methodology. Functionalism is based on the fundamental hypothesis that language certainly is a part of culture, and a very important one at that, but that it is not the only vehicle of communicative intentions between people and cultures. There are two situations that result in an intense feeling of a gap between cultures (which I would like to call the “cultural gap”):

- (a) when the lack of culture-specific background knowledge makes it impossible to establish coherence between what is said and what we know, and
- (b) when we have the impression that non-verbal and verbal behaviour do not match because we cannot interpret the non-verbal behaviour correctly.

In the following article, I am going to look at how these two factors make coherence difficult, or even impossible, in the reception of New Testament texts, texts from which we are separated by a wide “cultural gap”. These texts refer to a world that could not be more distant in time and space, yet their comprehension is vital for the identity and unity of Christianity today. Therefore, they are translated, and re-translated every now and again, into almost all of the planet’s languages. Before I share with you (some of) my own experience acquired while translating the New Testament, I am going to describe briefly what my theoretical point of departure is and how I happened to become a (temporary!) Bible translator. Let us start with a few remarks about the concept of culture I adhere to and what we understand by “cultural gap”.

## 2. THE “CULTURAL GAP”

In intracultural communication, the partners generally assume that their verbal or non-verbal behaviour can be interpreted correctly by their counterparts. Consequently, people do not normally give much thought to whether or not their *non-verbal* behaviour is intelligible, although they certainly seem ready to spend quite a lot of effort on choosing adequate forms of *verbal* behaviour to get their communicative intentions across. “Internatio-

nal” authors may even try to write “internationally” — that is, in a manner which they think is not too culture-specific — in order to find a broad international audience. Nevertheless, I would like to maintain that the cultural distance (or “gap”) between the source-culture author and his or her forms of expression (verbal or non-verbal), on the one hand, and any target-culture audience, on the other, is always there, even though, in some specific cases, it may not be relevant to the particular communicative act in question or so small that it need not be considered. At any rate, I believe that translators should always be aware of the culture-specificity of any form of behaviour. Taking the existence of the cultural gap to be the normal case and its irrelevance to be the exception may even be more practical than assuming a kind of universal culture (at least in the area of what has been called average Western cultures), which very frequently prevents us from seeing the cultural differences that exist even between cultures considered very similar.

The concept of culture used in functional translation theory is based on a definition given by the American ethnologist Ward H. Goodenough (1964:36):

As I see it, a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. Culture, being what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end product of learning: knowledge, in a most general, if relative, sense of the term. By this definition, we should note that culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour, or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them.

This definition was first introduced into the study of cross-cultural communication and slightly modified in order to address issues of translation by the late Heinz Göhring (1978:10), himself a cultural anthropologist and conference interpreter, who stressed the fact that in intercultural encounters the individual is free either to conform to the behaviour patterns accepted in the other culture or to bear the consequences of a form of behaviour that is contrary to target-cultural expectations. This means that there may be situations in translation where it is essential to bridge the cultural gap and others where the translator is supposed to leave the gap open and insist on the cultural distance between source and target cultures.

In this sense, culture is a complex system. It can be subdivided into paraculture (the norms, rules and conventions valid for an entire society), dia-

culture (norms, rules, and conventions valid for a particular group within the society, such as a club, a firm, or a regional entity) and idioculture (the culture of an individual person as opposed to other individuals) (cf. Ammann 1989:39f.).

However, the borderlines between cultural systems or sub-systems are notoriously difficult to define. A culture cannot simply be equated with a language area. For instance, the linguistic behaviour of the Scots and the English will be different in some situations and very similar in others. Or again, Dutch and Germans from the regions along their common border may differ in language but have similar value systems. In modern multicultural societies, we cannot even say that a town or a street represents a single homogeneous culture. Drawing on the ideas of Michael Agar, a North American anthropologist who worked as an “intercultural practitioner” along the border between the United States and Mexico, I have suggested a more flexible approach (Nord 1993:20f.), defining the culture barrier between two groups as consisting of the “rich points” where different behaviour may cause communication conflicts—from lexical items through speech acts to fundamental notions of how the world works (cf. Agar 1991:168). This means that, when presented with a particular translation task, a translator has to be very aware of the “rich points” between the groups or subgroups on either side of the language-and-culture barrier, even though she may decide to leave the barrier where it is and try to help people on either side look over it and understand the “otherness” of what is happening over there.

### 3. BIBLE TRANSLATION AS A CASE IN POINT

The idea to use the translation of New Testament texts as a case in point springs from recent personal experience. Together with my husband, Klaus Berger, New Testament scholar at Heidelberg University, I was involved in a new German translation of the New Testament, as well as the re-translation and, in part, the first German translation of a large number of non-canonical texts from the first two centuries of the Christian era. Apart from the New Testament, which we translated from the Greek (using the Nestle-Aland standard edition *Novum Testamentum Graece*), the other texts were available in various languages, among them Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic. Since I have no knowledge of most of these languages (apart from a little Greek and quite a bit of Latin, supported by my knowledge of modern Romance languages), we worked on the basis of “split competence”, i.e., Klaus Berger’s field was source languages and cultures (plus theological implications), and mine was target language and culture plus — very important! — translation competence.

We worked in four phases:

- 1) The source-culture expert produced a translation draft, putting particular emphasis on theological concepts and terminology, keeping with his own interpretation. This interpretation is derived from more than 25 years of scholarly research in the fields of early Christianity and Judaism, and from a broad knowledge of the various cultures that lived together in the Middle East during the centuries before and after Jesus' birth and life. It is, of course, also based on theological examination of the texts in question.
- 2) In a second step, I tried to understand and re-formulate, where necessary, the rough translation into a receiver-oriented German text. Very often the first version seemed incoherent to me. In these cases, I asked for an explanation and more than once found that it had been precisely my lack of cultural knowledge that had caused the incoherence. Considering myself as a (rather) prototypical representative of the intended audience (socialised in a Christian family, interested in religious matters, but no expert in theological questions), I next tried to fit the explanation into the translation as smoothly as possible so as to avoid a schoolmasterly or lecturing tone.
- 3) Then, the theological expert revised the German text again to make sure that I had not produced any historical incongruities or heresies.
- 4) After this (and after many a heated debate!) we decided on a final version.

## 4. BRIDGING THE GAP

### 4.1 Defining the Translation Skopos

The canonical Scriptures and the early Christian texts collected in our edition represent various text types: narratives and parables (in the Gospels), letters, hymns, prayers, theological arguments, songs, and a large number (approx. 300) of short, unconnected episodes from the life of Jesus that have been passed on by oral tradition in various Christian communities ("Agrapha"). Since a text-type or equivalence-oriented translation strategy would not hold water in this case because most of these text types are not used for their original function any more, we opted for a skopos-oriented approach (cf. Nord 1997). This means that we had to decide from the start

- a) which audience we wished to address, and
- b) what purpose we wished the translation to fulfil for the addressed audience.

With reference to the first question, it may be wise to start by stating who was not meant to be the addressed audience:

- theological scholars, who can be expected to know the source languages and cultures to a degree that they would not need a translation to bridge the “gap” between source and target cultures; and
- fundamentalists, who think that only a literal translation can provide a faithful rendering of the substance of the “holy original.”

On the contrary, the translation is directed mainly at

- lay people with an interest in the bases of their Christian faith, who very often find the existing translations too difficult to understand, especially when read out aloud in Church, because they lack the cultural knowledge of the world to which the texts refer, and
- theological mediators (pastors, teachers, ministers, preachers, catechists), who are no longer sufficiently familiar with the source language(s) and culture(s) to be able to prepare their classes or sermons using the original texts or a word-for-word rendering.

Beside these main addressees, the translation is also meant for a wider circle of possible readers, such as:

- lay people or theologians interested in the relations between source and target text(s) and who are expecting to learn more about the “information offer” (Reiss/Vermeer 1984) of the source text by analysing and comparing various translations, and
- persons who live at the periphery of the Christian community, and for whom the translation may offer a way to gain some insights into, or at least qualify their aversion to, the Christian religion, an aversion which is more often than not born out of incomprehension and lack of knowledge.

These considerations concerning the addressed audience led to two main communicative purposes we wished to achieve through our translation:

- a) first, to present a strange culture in a way that allows readers from a culture distant in time and space to understand and respect its otherness; this is an intention belonging to the referential function,
- b) second, to show where these texts - in spite of their strangeness and ancientness — have something to say to people living in a modern culture. This is a kind of indirect appellative intention, like an advertisement (if you pardon the profane comparison) that tries to persuade us to buy a particular model of car by describing all the terrific technological and luxury gadgets it offers.

At first glance, these two intentions seem opposed or even incompatible. At second glance, it may become clear that they can be subsumed under the heading of “Otherness Understood”.

## 4.2 Otherness Understood

It is interesting to note that early views on functional translation came from Bible translators — from St. Jerome (*Letter to Pammachius*) and Martin Luther (*Circular Letter on Translation*, 1530) to Eugene A. Nida, who in 1976 formulated his “sociolinguistic approach to translation”, which placed special emphasis on the purpose of the translation, the roles of both the translator and its receivers, and the cultural implications of the translation process (cf. Nida 1976:64f.).

The question of functionality seems to be more pressing in Bible translation than in the translation of other ancient texts like the *Odyssey* or Shakespeare’s sonnets, although the familiar sounds of traditional translations like the one by Martin Luther in German (even after several revisions) or the King James Version in English are like an old coat in which you feel comfortable even though it may not be the latest fashion. But it is often this unquestioned familiarity that stands in the way of comprehension, as is shown by Example 1.

Example 1:

*Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, chapter 1: 1-2*

Paul, and Timotheus, the *servants* of Jesus Christ, to *all the saints in Christ Jesus* which are at Philippi, with the *bishops* and *deacons*. Grace be onto you, and peace, *from* God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ. (KJV s.a.)

Filippense

Van Paulus en Timoteus, *dienaars* van Christus Jesus. Aan almal in Filippi wat deur Christus Jesus aan God behoort, met hulle *ouderlinge* en *diakens*. Genade en vrede vir julle *van* God ons Vader en die Here Jesus Christus. (AFR 1983.)

Paul’s letter to the Philippians

From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus - To all *God’s people in Philippi who are in union with Christ Jesus*, including the *church leaders* and *helpers*: *May* God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. (TEV 1992.)

Philippians

Paul and Timothy, *servants* of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the *overseers\** and *deacons*: Grace and peace *to you from* God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

\*Traditionally *bishops*. (NIV 1984.)

Aux Philippiens

Paul et Timothée, *serviteurs* de Christ Jésus, à tous les saints en Christ Jésus qui sont à Philippes, avec évêques et diacres; grâce à vous (soit) et paix, de la part de Dieu notre Père et du Seigneur Jésus Christ. (NTF 1922.)

Brief an die Philipper

Paulus und Timotheus, *Sklaven* Jesu Christi, schreiben diesen Brief an alle *Christen* in Philippi, auch an alle, die dort Aufsicht führen und andere Dienste leisten. Von Gott, unserem Vater, und vom Herrn Jesus Christus geben wir Gnade und Heil an euch weiter. (DNT 1999).

[Paul and Timotheus, *slaves* of Jesus Christ, are writing this letter to all *Christians* at Philippi, and to all those who are in charge and who are doing service there. We are passing on to you the mercy and salvation given by God, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.]

The passage illustrates our translation strategy in various ways.

- a) Paul and Timothy live in a society that includes both slaves and servants, whereas, in our cultures, we still have the institution of servants and we have a historical knowledge of slavery, even though slavery has been abolished in most parts of the world (at least in the literal sense of the word). If Paul and Timothy consider themselves slaves of Jesus Christ (and, therefore, there is no question of political correctness involved here!), they refer to a different relationship than that between servant and master, which is a relation of ownership. Thus, in this context, the word *slave* emphasises the strangeness of the culture.
- b) By paraphrasing the functions of bishops and deacons and referring to them as leaders and helpers (as in TEV 1992 and NIV 1984), the translation aims at avoiding unreflected equations and once again stresses cultural difference.
- c) In contrast, addressing the *saints in Jesus Christ* and wishing them *grace and peace from God*, has nothing to do with strangeness of culture, but rather with strangeness of language. If we are honest, we must admit that we do not really know what these formulas mean, although they sound so familiar. The use of the modern word *Christians* for *saints in Jesus Christ*, which is even clearer than “God’s people who are in union with Christ Jesus” (TEV 1992), makes the text easier to understand without “sacrificing” anything worth preserving (referential intention), and
- d) The reference to St. Paul’s authority to pass on God’s grace and peace (cf. DNT 1999) may give the reader an idea of the apostle’s role in early



Christian society, which is not conveyed by the mere wish “May God give you...” (cf. TEV 1992) or “Grace and peace to you from...” (NIV 1983).

### 4.3 Cultural Knowledge and Text Functionality

Let me now give you a few more examples illustrating some specific aspects of what we did. We will first look at a number of passages where culture-specific background knowledge is required to make the text work in the target culture. In a second section, we will discuss some examples of named or implied, but not described, culture-specific non-verbal behaviour that interferes with coherence.

#### 4.3.1 Strange names for strange phenomena or familiar names for unfamiliar things?

You will certainly remember the story of the man by the Bethesda pool (Jn. 5), whom Jesus tells to get up, take up his “bed” and go home.

Example 2: Jn. 5:8

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up *thy bed*, and walk. (KJV s.a.)

Jesus said to him: Get up, pick up your mat, and walk. Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking. (TEV 1992.)

Jesus sê toe vir hom: “Staan op, tel jou goed op en loop.” (AFR 1983.)

Jésus lui dit: “Lève-toi, prends ton lit et marche.” (NTF 1922.)

Da sagte Jesus zu ihm: “Steh auf, nimm deinen Strohsack und lauf!” Kaum hatte Jesus das gesagt, da war der Mann gesund. Er nahm seinen Strohsack und konnte wieder laufen. (DNT 1999.)

[Jesus said to him: Get up, pick up your straw mattress, and walk. Hardly had Jesus said these words, when the man was well. He picked up his straw mattress and was able to walk.]

Just think of somebody taking his “bed” and walking home after lying, ill, beside a pool for 38 years. TEV 1992 translates “mat”, we have translated “straw mattress”, thus bridging the cultural gap because this is what people used to sleep on at that time in Palestine.

In this case, the traditional translation does not really interfere with comprehension, since we may expect the readers to imagine some sort of portable bed. But it makes the audience feel too much “at home” in the foreign culture, and this may thus cause incoherence in other passages of the text.

In the next example, the strange object, a “bushel” put over a lamp, diverts the reader’s attention from the core of the message to something that is only a peripheral detail:

Example 3: Mt. 5:15 (Context: You are the light of the world...)

Neither do men light a candle and *put it under a bushel*, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. (KJV.)

No one lights a lamp and *puts it under a bowl*; instead he puts it on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. (GNB 1976.)

...ook steek 'n mens nie 'n lamp op *en sit dit onder 'n emmer* nie maar op 'n lampstaander, en dit gee lig vir almal in die huis. (AFR 1983.)

On n’allume pas non plus une lampe *pour la mettre sous le boisseau*, mais (on la place) sur le support, et elle éclaire tous ceux qui sont dans la maison. (NTF 1922.)

Und wer ein Licht anzündet, wird *keinen Topf darüber stülpen*, sondern es auf den Leuchter stellen, damit es allen im Haus hellen Schein gibt. (DNT 1999.)

[Somebody who lights a lamp will not *put a pot over it* but place it on a lampstand to make it give light to everyone in the house.]

According to the *Dictionary of Contemporary English*, a bushel is “a measure, esp. of grain; about 36.5 litres”, but since the form and function of the object is completely beside the point in this context, a pot or a bowl serves the purpose of hiding the lamp. We translated “put a pot over it” instead of “put it under a pot” because this seemed to us the more natural way of acting.

The last example of this section refers to a word, πορνεία, which in the New Testament covers a wide range of social phenomena, from immoral behaviour, adultery and prostitution to marrying a gentile. The King James Authorized Version translates πορνεία by *fornication*; NTF 1922 renders it as *fornications*; most German versions — even the modern *Gute Nachricht Bibel* (GNV 1997), which in many other respects corresponds in style to the English *Good News Bible* or *Today’s English Version* (TEV 1992) — use the old word *Unzucht*, which is slightly obsolete and has, today, a connotation either of juridical or precisely biblical language, referring to phenomena like homosexuality, pederasty, sodomy, etc.). To show the variety of meanings, I will contrast DNT 1999 with NTF 1922 and TEV 1976, which usually refers to immorality in general. TEV 1992 gives “sexual immorality” throughout. By using such general terms, the severity of the biblical laws is reduced to ethical vagueness.

## Example 4: Fornication and immorality

Mt. 15:19 — DNT 1999: Sexgier [sexual greed]; TEV 1976: do other immoral things; NTF 1922: débauches.

1Cor. 6:9 — DNT 1999: Lüstling [lecher]; TEV 1976: people who are immoral; NTF 1922: les impudiques.

1Cor. 6:18 — DNT 1999: Lasst euch auf keinen Fall mit einer Dirne ein! [Don't get involved with a prostitute!]; TEV 1976: Avoid immorality; NTF 1922: Fuyez l'impudicité.

Eph. 4:19 — DNT 1999: Sie brechen jedes Tabu, weil sie immer mehr haben wollen. [They break any kind of taboo because they are always greedy for more.]; TEV 1976: They ... do all sorts of indecent things without restraint; NTF 1922: se sont livrés à l'impudicité.

Hebr. 13:4 — DNT 1999: Gott ist ein strenger Richter über Lüsternheit... [God is a severe judge over lecherousness...]; TEV 1976: God will judge those who are immoral...; NTF 1922: débauches.

Rev. 2:14 — DNT 1999: dazu zu verführen, dass sie ... schamlos mit heidnischen Frauen verkehrten [persuade the people of Israel to ... have shameless intercourse with gentiles]; TEV 1976: ...to lead the people of Israel into sin by persuading them to ... practise sexual immorality; NTF 1922: pour qu'ils ... s'adonnassent à fornications.

Rev. 2:20 — DNT 1999: Mit ihrer Lehre verführt sie diejenigen, die mir gehorsam sind, dazu, Mischehen mit heidnischen Frauen einzugehen [...she misleads those who obey me into marrying gentiles]; TEV 1976: ...she misleads my servants into practising sexual immorality; NTF 1922: pour qu'ils s'adonnent à fornication.

Rev. 17:2 — DNT, 1999: Die Könige der Erde haben sich mit ihr eingelassen, und die Erdbewohner haben sich an ihr wie an Wein berauscht. [The kings of the earth got involved with her and the people of the earth went into raptures over her as over wine.]; TEV 1976: ...the people of the world became drunk from drinking the wine of her immorality; NTF 1922: avec laquelle ont forniqué les rois de la terre...

In some cases, the lack of cultural background knowledge does not interfere with comprehension but lessens the appellative function of a passage, as in the following description of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:18-21). The source-culture readers knew the colours of the precious stones mentioned, whereas target-culture readers cannot be expected to be familiar with the colour and quality of most of these stones. This is why we decided to add an indication of the colours of each stone. TEV 1992 and AFR 1983, which also aim at comprehensibility, differ from DNT 1999 in that the latter emphasises the appellative function, whereas the former treat the text like a technical description.

## Example 5a: TEV 1992

The wall was made of jasper, and the city itself was made of pure gold, as clear as glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with all kinds of precious stones. The first foundation stone was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh yellow quartz, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chalcedony, the eleventh turquoise, the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each gate was made from a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, transparent as glass.

## Example 5b: AFR 1983

Die muur is met opaal gebou en die stad self met suiwer goud wat soos 'n skoon spieël lyk. Die fundamente van die stadsmuur is met allerhande edelstene versier: die eerste fondament met opaal, die tweede met saffier, die derde met agaat, die vierde met smaragd, die vyfde met sardoniks, die sesde met karneool, die sewende met chrisoliet, die agste met beril, die negende met topaas, die tiende met chrisopraas, die elfde met hiasint en die twaalfde met ametis. Die twaalf poorte is twaalf pèrels. Elkeen van die poorte is uit een pèrel gemaak. Die strate van die stad is van suiwer goud, blink soos 'n spieël.

## Example 5c: DNT 1999

Die Stadtmauer ist aus Jaspis erbaut, die Stadt selbst aus glasreinem Gold. Die Fundamente der Stadtmauer sind von großer Schönheit, denn sie bestehen aus verschiedenfarbenen Edelsteinen. Das erste Fundament ist aus *grünlichem* Jaspis, das zweite aus *blauem* Saphir, das dritte aus *rotem* Chalzedon, das vierte aus *hellgrünem* Smaragd, das fünfte aus *rotbraunem* Sardonyx, das sechste aus *gelbrottem* Carneol, das siebte aus *goldgelbem* Chrysolit, das achte aus *meergrünem* Beryll, das neunte aus *gelbglänzendem* Topas, das zehnte aus *goldgrün* schimmerndem Chrysopras, das elfte aus *dunkelrotem* Hyazinth, das zwölfte aus *purpurnem* Amethyst. Die zwölf Tortürme sind zwölf Perlen, jeder Torturm besteht aus einer einzigen Perle, und die Hauptstraße der Stadt ist aus glasreinem Gold.

[The city wall is made of jasper, and the city itself of gold that is as pure as glass. The foundations of the city wall are of great beauty, for they are built out of precious stones in many different colours. The first foundation-stone is green jasper, the second blue sapphire, the third red agate, the fourth light green emerald, the fifth reddish brown onyx, the sixth yellowish red carnelian, the seventh yellow-gold quartz, the eighth beryl as green as the sea, the ninth shining yellow topaz, the tenth chalcedony, shimmering green-golden, the eleventh deep red turquoise, the twelfth purple amethyst. The twelve gates are twelve pearls, each gate is made from a single pearl. The main street of the city is of gold as pure as glass.]

Looking at the colours more closely may even remind us of the rainbow — and almost the same precious stones are used with reference to the Garden Eden in Ezek. 28:13.

### 4.3.2 Strange behaviour in familiar situations

In face-to-face communication, the presence of other than verbal means of expression is obvious. We find *paralanguage*, that is, the way people speak (voice quality, loudness, pitch) and the independent, word-like utterances they produce (like “hum”), *kinesics*, that is, the way people move, their body-language, gestures, manners, postures, eye and face movements, whether or not they look into each others faces, *proxemics*, that is, the distance they keep in relation to each other, and whether (and where) they touch each other in the course of the communication, *chronemics*, that is, the behaviour in, and the concept of, time, including such aspects as the length of pauses in conversation, the conventions of turn-taking, or general norms of “punctuality”, *chemical and dermal reactions* like sweat, tears, blushing, goose-pimples, and *object-mediated or bodily generated sounds*, such as the slamming of a door or the sound of footsteps, or the noises we make (or refrain from making) when we are eating (cf. Poyatos 1993:137ff.).

If these forms of behaviour are obvious in face-to-face communication, they are not as visible, although equally existent, in written communication, where, as Poyatos (1983:290) puts it, the

multisensory and intellectual world imagined by the writer is reduced to the morphologico-syntactical representation which is the written text, that is, a visual form of expression.

The reader has to reverse the process, amplifying the visual signs,

by mentally bringing them back to life and turning the written words into intimate imagined sensations of optical, auditive, tactile, olfactory, kinesthetic, and dermal experiences” (ibid.: 292).

The “channel reduction” that takes place in writing down something felt, seen or heard, is followed by a “channel amplification” in the act of reception. What is “brought back to life” is the situation described in the text, where agents (fictitious or real) are involved in communicative or non-communicative actions. It is fairly obvious that the ability to “bring back to life” something written down in a text presupposes that the reader has experienced analogous situations, where people have acted or reacted in a similar way. Just try to imagine the following scene (Jn. 20:11-18).

Example 6a: TEV 1992

Context: Jn. 21:1-10: Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know

where they have put him!" (3-10: *The two disciples accompany Mary Magdalene to the tomb, one after another, they look into the tomb and find the linen wrappings, but no trace of Jesus' body. Then they go home.*)

Mary stood crying outside the tomb. *While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet.* "Woman, why are you crying?" they asked her. She answered, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!" Then she turned round and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. "Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it that you are looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, "If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" *She turned towards him* and said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (This means "Teacher.")

"Do not hold on to me," Jesus told her, "because I have not yet gone back up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God."

#### Example 6b: AFR 1983

Maar Maria het buite by die graf bly staan en huil. *Terwyl sy huil, het sy vooroor gebuk om in die graf te kyk.* Toe sien sy twee engele met wit klere aan daar sit waar die liggaam van Jesus gelê het, een waar die kop en een waar die voete was. Hulle vra toe vir haar: "Mevrou, *waarom huil jy?*" Sy antwoord hulle: "Omdat hulle my Here weggevat het en ek nie weet waar hulle Hom nou begrawe het nie." Nadat sy dit gesê het, *het sy omgedraai en vir Jesus daar sien staan,* maar sy het nie geweet dat dit Hy is nie. Jesus vra haar toe: "Mevrou, *waarom huil jy? Vir wie soek jy?*" Sy het gedink dit is die tuinopsigter, en sy het vir hom gesê: "Meneer, as u Hom weggevat het, sê vir my waar u Hom begrawe het, en ek sal Hom daar gaan haal." Jesus het vir haar gesê: "Maria!" *Sy draai na Hom toe en sê en Hebreeus vir Hom: "Rabboeni!"* Dit beteken leermeester. Jesus sê toe vir haar: "*Moet My nie vashou nie,* want Ek het nog nie na die Vader toe opgevaar nie. Maar gaan na my broers toe en sê vir hulle: "Ek vaar op na my Vader toe, wat ook julle Vader is, na my God, wat ook julle God is."

#### Example 6c: NTF 1922

Cependant Marie se tenait près du tombeau, dehors, pleurant. *Tout en pleurant, elle se pencha sur le tombeau,* et elle vit deux anges en habits blancs, assis, l'un à la tête, et l'autre aux pieds, (à l'endroit) où avait reposé le corps de Jésus. Et ces (anges) lui dirent: "Femme, pourquoi pleures-tu?" Elle leur dit: "C'est qu'on a enlevé mon Seigneur et je ne sais où on l'a mis." Cela dit, elle se retourna et elle vit Jésus qui se tenait (là); et elle ne s'aperçut pas que c'était Jésus. Jésus lui dit: "Femme, pourquoi pleures-tu? Qui cherches-tu?" Elle, pensant que c'était le jardinier, lui dit: "Seigneur, si c'est toi qui l'as emporté, dis-mois où tu l'as mis, et je l'enlèverai." Jésus lui dit: "Mariam!" Elle, *se tournant,* lui dit en hébreu: "Rabbuni!" — Ce qui veut dire "maître". — Jésus lui dit: "*Ne me touche pas;* car je ne suis pas encore

monté vers le Père. Mais va trouver mes frères et dis-leur (que) je monte vers mon Père et votre Père, (vers) mon Dieu et votre Dieu.”

Visualising the scene, we find Mary’s behaviour rather surprising in two instances: first, when she is crying and bending down to look into the tomb (although she had been convinced that Jesus’ body was not there when she first found the stone removed, and so much so that she had not taken the opportunity to go into the tomb with Simon Peter and the other disciple), and second, when she merely turns towards Jesus, and he tells her not to hold on to him.

From the original text it becomes clear that she actually does not “look into” the tomb in order to find out what was in there (as AFR 1983 makes us believe), but she “saw” the two angels in the tomb *while* she was crying. I was struck by the apparent incoherence of the passage until I remembered mourning scenes in the Middle East. There, nobody *stands crying*, rather a woman mourning the death of somebody dear to her shows strong body action, bending forward and backward. This recollection is confirmed in works about Palestinian mourning rituals, where a bent back is an indispensable prerequisite. Moreover, the verb describing what Mary is doing does not mean “to stand (on one’s feet)” but “to be located”, although all the German and English translations I looked at, and also AFR 1983, tell us that she *stands* outside the tomb. If we imagine her bending forward or down in grief while she is crying, it is obvious that, in doing so, she accidentally sees the angels in the tomb.

From the (familiar) way he calls her name, Mary realises that the man whom she took for the gardener is Jesus. Therefore, she turns towards him (but why would she “turn towards” him, if she has been talking to him already?) and calls him “Teacher.” Jesus’ reaction to her behaviour shows that he wants to keep her at a distance and prevent her from touching him (“Touch me not” in KJV s.a.). So, what was she going to do? Was she going to hold him in order to make him stay, as the TEV 1992 (like NIV 1984) suggests? But she has been his follower long enough to know that she would not keep him from “going up to the Father” by holding on to his sleeve. It is much more likely that she was going to embrace his feet to express her worship for the person whom she assumes was resurrected in order to sit on God’s right. For members of her culture, this would have been the appropriate thing to do under the circumstances. This interpretation is also supported by a number of other texts, e.g., Mt. 28:9 (KJV: *and they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him*). But how can the modern reader guess that this is the missing link in the scene? DNT 1999 therefore “bridges the gap”:

## Example 6d: DNT 1999

Maria aber blieb vor dem Grab und weinte bitterlich, von Kummer und Schmerz gebeugt. Als sie aufblickte, sah sie plötzlich in der Grabkammer zwei Engel in leuchtenden Gewändern an der Stelle sitzen, wo Jesus gelegen hatte, einen am Kopfende und einen am Fußende. Die Engel sprachen sie an: "Warum weinst du, gute Frau?" Sie antwortete: "Sie haben meinen Herrn weggenommen, und ich weiß nicht, wohin sie ihn gebracht haben." Dann drehte sie sich um und sah einen Mann dastehen. Es war Jesus, doch sie wußte nicht, daß er es war. Er fragte sie: "Warum weinst du, gute Frau? Suchst du jemanden?" Sie dachte, er sei der Gärtner, und antwortete: "Herr, wenn du ihn weggetragen hast, sag mir bitte, wo er ist, damit ich ihn holen kann." Da sagte Jesus zu ihr: "Maria!" Sie machte einen Schritt auf ihn zu, um ihn kniefällig zu verehren, und rief: "Rabbuni!" Das ist hebräisch und heißt "Lehrer". Jesus aber bat sie: "Noch nicht anbeten, bitte! Denn noch bin ich nicht zum Vater hinaufgestiegen..."

[Mary remained outside the tomb, crying bitterly, *bent down in grief*. When *she looked up, she suddenly saw* two angels in shining clothes sitting in the tomb, right where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. The angels addressed her, "Good woman, why are you crying?". She answered, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!" Then she turned round and saw a man standing there. It was Jesus, but she did not know that it was him. He asked her, "Good woman, why are you crying? Are you looking for somebody?" She thought he was the gardener, and answered, "If you took him away, sir, please tell me where you have put him, so that I can go and get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" *She made a step towards him to worship him on her knees* and said "Rabbuni!" (This is Hebrew and means "My Teacher!") But Jesus begged, "*Do not worship me yet*, for I have not yet gone up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to my Father, to your Father, to my God, to your God."]

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Let me conclude by summing up a few considerations with regard to the "cultural gap" in Bible translation.

- (a) As long as we are not translating biblical texts to fulfil their canonical function as fundamental text of a religious community, we may state that Bible translation is a translational activity that does not differ substantially from the translation of other texts belonging to a culture that is distant from our own in time and space. In this context, I do not consider the translation of biblical or religious texts as a translation type in its own right, as is put forward by some translation scholars (e.g., Wilss 1982).



- (b) The New Testament alone includes texts belonging to many text types which cannot fulfil the same communicative functions in modern societies that they were intended for in their original social and cultural situation. Therefore, a translation of these texts cannot rely on equivalence standards. What is needed, is a target-orientated strategy, where a new skopos is defined independently of the functions of the original. If the overall skopos is subsumed under the concept of “Otherness Understood”, the appropriate translation type is a documentary-exoticizing translation (cf. Nord 1997: 48ff.) respecting the culture-specific features of both the text world and the communicative intentions of the author(s) and trying to make them seem coherent and comprehensible to a target-culture audience.
- (c) The translation of biblical and early Christian texts is also a “normal” translation in that it requires profound factual knowledge in addition to cultural and linguistic knowledge. Since translators rarely manage to achieve a sufficient depth of knowledge in this complex field and theologians rarely combine their factual knowledge with good translation competence, teamwork may be advisable in this area, even more than in others.
- (d) Last, but not least, and this is very important for translator training, the experience of this translation task has shown me what I always suspected but was never able to prove, i.e., there is such a thing as a general, language-independent translation competence, which is not inseparably linked to the language and culture pairs used to acquire translation competence during training. This competence can be transferred to other language and culture pairs, provided the necessary knowledge of the field and its terminology as well as the necessary linguistic and cultural competence is there (not necessarily in the same person!).

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