PRAGMATIC LINGUISTICS APPLIED TO BIBLE TRANSLATION, PROJECTS AND INTER-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS: AN AFRICAN FOCUS

Jim Harries[*]

Introduction

Translation issues have all too often been considered the rightful domain of SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) and UBS (United Bible Societies)—the Bible translators. This article challenges this restrictive wisdom. The linguistic guidelines proposed in this article are important for those engaged in church planting, theological education, and all kinds of support and development projects. While few missionaries doubt the value of having Scripture in people's own languages, more need to consider the importance of not only *having* them but also using them, and building on the foundation that they represent. Missionaries need, I argue in this essay, to pay urgent attention to linguistic and translation issues that bear heavily on their mission and ministry.

Mission methodologies can be so misguided as not to be effective even in 'Christianized' parts of the world. This article attempts to provide guidance on knowing how to avoid some of the difficult problems of inter-cultural mission contexts.[1]

1. Reconsidering Dynamic Equivalence Methodology

The 'dynamic equivalence' methodology of Biblical translation, taken as standard in popular books such as that of Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart,[2] is considered to originate in Eugene Nida's work,[3] and is strongly affirmed by well-known names like Charles Kraft.[4] Unfortunately, it can be seriously misleading, especially in inter-cultural contexts. I base this critique on the case that word meaning arises from having impacts on contexts (e.g., cognitive, social, personal, textual).[5]

On walking into your sitting room you find a word written on a piece of paper on the floor. This could be any word; *chocolate* or *Christian* or *holiness* or an unpleasant word such as *dead* or a neutral word such as *house*. What could these words mean to you as you pick up the piece of paper and begin to read? Nothing. Nothing, that is, unless or until you add a context to the words. Has someone *left you* some

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[*] Jim Harries is part-time lecturer at Kima International School of Theology, Kenya, and adjunct professor at William Carey International University, Pasadena, CA; jharries@africaonline.co.ke.

1. For the purpose of this article, 'pragmatics' is defined as the "study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding." Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics: Cambridge text books in linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 21. Note also that 'Africa' in this essay refers to Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 36.

3. For example, see Eugene Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating, with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964).

4. Charles H. Kraft, "Can Anthropological Insight Assist Evangelical Theology?" in *Culture, Communication and Christianity: A Selection of Writings by Charles H. Kraft*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001), 268–9.

5. For comparable critiques of dynamic equivalence methodology, see Robert L. Thomas, "Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?" *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Further details not given, n.d.): 149–69, pdf. http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj1g.pdf (accessed February 28, 2007).

chocolate? Perhaps your *husband has become* a *Christian*; or maybe your daughter is telling you that *you need more holiness*; or your son has found that *the dog* is *dead*; or your mother's *house* has *been sold*. But someone's leaving of the chocolate, becoming of the husband, telling of your daughter, finding of your son, dying of the dog, or selling of your mother's house are not in the word. These are contexts outside the word on the paper, which you are utilizing in order to derive some meaning for the word on the paper! Without them the individual words mean nothing at all.[6]

What about a sentence like, "The cat is on the mat"? Unlike an individual word, this seems to mean something. But, is this meaning context-free? What is a cat? Does one learn about cats by studying the word *cat*, or by looking at a *context* such as hearing cats, hearing about cats, stroking cats, and so on? The meaning of the word *cat* arises from the context of a cat being around someone, and not from the word itself. So what of "on the mat"? What is a mat, and what is to be on it? Having once been told, "The pen is on the table", then seeing a pen on the table, someone will assume that the cat being on the mat will resemble the pen being on the table. The word "mat" doesn't tell you what a mat is. The context in which the word has been used in the past does this. So then, phrases (sentences, paragraphs, etc.) are as "full of contexts" as are words.[7]

People have different contexts and upbringings. Thus they differ in what they apply to a word to derive its meaning. This in turn means that different people will infer different meanings from the same words. In the course of translation by a process of dynamic equivalence, translators derive meaning from a word/sentence/text as understood in their particular context, then try to translate *that* meaning into the target language. Dynamic equivalence methodologies attempt to translate meanings (thought expressed in a source text) and not words[8] yet we have found that the meanings are peculiar to contexts. How can translators know that the context that they happen to use to translate is correct, or the one that the reader of the translation *ought* to get? To the extent that the context determines the meaning, which is a large extent, this decision is arbitrary.[9] What translators using dynamic equivalence methodology end up doing then is translating not words, but contexts.

When the Bible is translated into English by an Australian person, we get an Australian-English context translation of the Bible. Such a Bible may be appropriate for use in an Australian (cultural) context, but may not be accurate for a non-Australian context. That is, Bible translations are accurate in the context in which they have been produced. A more helpful translation of the Bible into a non-Australian context may be a 'literal' translation, which converts the *original* language as closely as possible word for word, to preserve original word order for interaction with this non-Australian context. That is, the context dependence of translation means that it may be better for people from a non-Australian milieu to use what is other than either the Australian-translated Bible or a version of the Bible translated from it.

I have indicated the serious weakness of the dynamic equivalence interpretation methodology *in cross-cultural context*. Thus, Bibles that are translated according to the principles of dynamic equivalence (such as the NIV) and in fact also free translations such as the Good News or Living Bibles (because they use

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6. The handwriting, the color of ink, and the kind of paper on which the word is written are all parts of the 'context' of the word.

7. It is often said that the Bible is correctly understood only when every part is read in the context of the whole. While this is correct, it is still the extra-biblical context that lays the groundwork for understanding all the words concerned. That is, individual parts of the Bible, such as lions, people, houses, God, crying, and so on, are first understood by people from *outside* of the Bible before they are found in the Bible.

8. "Dynamic and formal equivalence," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formal_equivalence (accessed February 27, 2008).

9. If this decision is guided by the Holy Spirit, it is not 'translation' but 'inspiration'. The possibility of inspiration presumably does not do away with the need for careful translation.

the same principle but follow a less systematic process) are strictly only appropriate for the culture in which they have been prepared. This principle is rarely considered in the inter-cultural context. Bibles in other (especially African) languages, it appears, are increasingly being translated from dynamic equivalence translations such as the NIV rather than from Biblical languages or more literal translations like the KJV. (This is the impression that I get from the African language Bibles that I am familiar with, and not a conclusion based on widespread research.) The most recent Luo language (the language of a Western Kenyan people) Bible is certainly a case in point: "This IBS translation of the New Testament is for *Dholuo* [an alternate name for the Luo language], which is primarily used in Kenya. This translation uses an informal language style and applies a meaning-based translation philosophy. It is translated from the English NIV and was completed in October 2000."[10] This results in the confusing situation in which translations of Bibles into non-Western cultures incorporate content arising from the expression of Western people's culture, and Western people's ignorance of non-Western people's culture.[11]

The same of course applies even more strongly to Bible *expositions* and *teachings* from the West. Moving such teachings outside of their home context will result both in the emergence of communication 'gaps', or 'baggage'. Preachers and Bible teachers who move to foreign cultures but teach according to the context of their home culture often teach, not the Bible, but their own cultures.

This can be illustrated using the following examples. People who are used to seeing cows in a field will not comment on seeing cows in a field because to them this is normal. Those accustomed to seeing sheep in a field may well exclaim, "There are cows in the field!" Hearers will not learn that there are cows in the field (they already know it as the animals are before their eyes). Rather, they will learn that the speaker normally does not see cows in fields. The listener is not learning about his/her own context but about that of the speaker. Similarly, when someone says "Pastors shouldn't inherit their dead brothers' wives," he will be revealing to listeners that this is a custom of the speaker's people. Telling someone that it is "wrong to be two hours late for a meeting" informs the listener that late-coming is an issue. Saying "Jesus loves even the Bemba people" reveals a problem in relationship with the Bemba people. Stating that "Christians shouldn't participate in Valentine's Day" could be *informing* someone that there is a thing called Valentine's Day, and so on.

Teaching the Bible to someone from another context will inform the listener about the culture of the speaker. Some African colleagues have told me that when Westerners teach the Bible in Africa, they can distinguish foreign cultural elements from true Biblical instruction. My own observation at many points, however, is that they fail to do this. Hence in Africa, English can become a 'holy' language which propels the spread of the prosperity gospel, and misunderstandings, which may individually be small, accrue. Hence, missionaries ought not to teach the Bible until they have learned the context of the people they are reaching. Good Bible teaching must be intra-cultural. Necessary for learning cultural context is the learning of language. So also, the impact of Christian books from one cultural context read in another may be vastly different in meaning from what was originally intended. Theologies, to be in tune with local culture, should (must) grow locally. As Sanneh puts it, "… one can demand or even require a vernacular direction for the faith in the interests of orthodoxy."[12]

Some may ask, if acquiring meaning from words is all about context, and if we read the Bible through our context, where is God? The answer of course is—in the context! God is not paper and ink. He is a God

10. *Luo Bible* (International Bible Society, 2000), http://www.ibs.org/bibles/luo/index.php (accessed February 12, 2007).

11. Such content is, not a road map which may be helpful to someone to understand the West, but comments on passing scenery of a culturally specific nature, and thus is of no value to non-Western hearers/readers.

12. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 174.

who is living and dynamic, moving and working. God is an essential part of the context, who must be there in order for us to correctly understand his word. And I do not think that this is saying anything new.

2. Alternative Translation Methodologies and Their Impact on Doctrine and Belief

This chapter considers 'modern' approaches to translation outlined by Aloo Osotsi Mojola and Ernst Wendland,[13] in reference to interpretation of the Bible, theology, culture, and in fact the whole of life. The existence of alternative translation methodologies shows that dynamic equivalence is only one of many options.[14]

Mojola and Wendland refer us to Christine Nord[15] and functionalist approaches to translation. A reader "chooses the items they regard as interesting, useful or adequate to the desired purposes," says Nord.[16] The *skopos* rule of Nord is to "translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function."[17] So, one way of translating Scripture is according to their perceived *function*. If Scripture is translated for use in the West according to the intended function in the West, this is problematic when the same Scripture is to be used in another context where there ought to have a different function. To take a simplistic example, Scriptural interpretation that emphasizes the need for faith to a disbelieving secular society may have the unfortunate effect of aggravating magical beliefs in a holistic society rooted in a 'magical worldview' (A North American preacher telling his audience that he "depends totally on God" will be understood by his fellow countrymen as meaning, "in addition to my pension, paid-off mortgage, two cars in the garage," etc., but could easily be understood by African people as implying that they need not plant any crops that year). Again, as I have emphasized above, this applies to Scriptural interpretation in the broad sense—including preaching, systematic theologies, devotional books, and so on.

An alternative approach to translation is to ensure that a description of an original applies to a description of the translated text. For example, if an original text is described as a "beautiful piece of poetry," its translation must be a "beautiful piece of poetry." If the original is "advice on how to find a wife," then the translation must be "advice on how to find a wife." Other similarities in content between these texts are considered to be of secondary importance. A "beautiful piece of poetry" may refer to flowers and sunshine, while the one that 'translates' it may talk of romance. According to the descriptive approach, this will be a correct 'translation'. A text on "how to find a wife" will be very different in an American dating culture from a Hindu Indian arranged-marriage culture, and so on.

Missionaries and theologians need to consider carefully just when a descriptive approach is appropriate. Most Scriptural translations have not followed this methodology. Words ('meanings' or impacts) of poetry and not rhyme or cadence are translated into contemporary Bible versions; the Book of Proverbs, for example, can be totally non-poetic in contemporary translations. The descriptive approach should certainly be considered if one is asked to translate a book on "how to plant a successful church" from American English to African English or another African language. Rather than words, sentences, or even

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13. Aloo Osotsi Mojola and Ernst Wendland, "Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies," in *Bible Translation Frames of Reference*, ed. Timothy Wilt (Manchester: St Jerome Publications, 2003), 1–25.

14. In this article, I assume that making a sharp distinction between interpretation and translation is unhelpful because every interpretation is a kind of translation, and every translation requires interpretation.

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

16. Nord, 25.

17. Mojola and Wendland, 13–4.

paragraphs being recognizably similar to those of the original, what is important is that what is advocated in the text works in the African context, even if the content in terms of actual words comes to be different from the original. The same applies to preachers and teachers. Should missionaries tell their 'foreign' audience how "they do it at home," or what works in the new host culture? The latter is only possible once they are familiar with the culture.[18]

The text-linguistic approach looks at turbulence or dynamism in texts, especially where it has an important role to play. An American advising his fellow pastor to take a second wife in order to resolve a family issue has a turbulence arising from its incongruity, yet translated literally into many African contexts (especially of some indigenous churches), such textual turbulence may totally disappear and advice given can be assumed to be very serious. For the African pastor an alternative suggestion would need to be made to give the text an equivalent turbulence.[19] The question of turbulence should be borne in mind by Bible translators and in Christian ministry. The lack of cultural knowledge may result in cross-cultural preachers or teachers unknowingly creating or removing 'turbulence' in their preaching/teaching.

Relevance theory attempts to explain *how* the impact of words onto a person causes 'meaning'. "Verbal communication typically conveys much more than is linguistically encoded," say Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson.[20] 'Relevance', according to Sperber and Wilson, "makes information worth processing for the human being"[21] in texts capable of (often widely) different interpretation. Using the principle of *relevance*, the correct meaning has "the greatest possible contextual effect" and requires the "smallest possible processing effort."[22] That is, readers or listeners generally make some assumptions. One of these is that the speaker will take the listeners to be able to discern which of the possible meanings that could be ascribed to a speaker's words is the one intended. Someone communicating with them will assume that they as listeners will assume the correct understanding for them to be the one that demands the least processing effort while having the greatest contextual impact on them. For details on this complex but profound and widely acclaimed theory, see Sperber and Wilson's text.[23]

'Post-colonial' approaches to translation consider its power implications. Taking translation as always having to do with questions of authority and influence, this approach assumes preachers or Bible teachers operate out of some self-interest. Translation, according to these critics, can never be an uninterested affair.

Literalist translations have recently gained respect following the discovery of serious weaknesses in the dynamic equivalence model of interpretation (as above). Some literalist translators maintain that retaining equivalents to original words in the original order is more important in translation than correct grammar. This can be illustrated by considering adjectives. In English, one instinctively says, "a big, red brick house," while the Kiswahili rendering would naturally be "house big red of bricks."[24] The English word

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18. Should visiting preachers *not* go about this process of translation, they are in effect leaving it for the locals to do so.

19. It is hard to find an example to fit without causing misunderstanding among the non-African target readership of this article.

20. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Remarks on Relevance Theory and the Social Sciences," *Multilingua* 16 (1997): 145–51, http://www.dan.sperber.com/rel-soc.htm (accessed February 14, 2007), n.p.

21. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 46.

22. Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, vii.

23. This theory was taught for the first time to Bible translators in Kenya at the Bible Translation and Literary Conference Center in Ruiru, Nairobi in August 31, 2006.

24. My translation.

ordering leaves the reader (or the hearer) in suspense over what is to be described, whereas the Kiswahili word order produces suspense over the nature of the described item. Translation of suspense may require grammar to be incorrect.

"Translation wields enormous power in constructing representations of foreign cultures."[25] According to Lawrence Venuti, translators choose between making a text appear domestic and retaining its 'foreignness'. While a translation can never be 100% accurate because the impact of words differs from one language to another, a translator can choose to conceal or reveal heterogeneity/foreignness, for example, by maintaining foreign words in the target language. Insisting that every foreign word be translated by an indigenous one is domesticating a text. Many English theological terms used in non-English theological texts show an ongoing tension with the 'English' worldview. Translating every word would result in the text being a less accurate representation of the English original. Domestication can obscure very real cultural differences from view, whereas incorporating foreign words (or transliterations) can reduce flow and increase reading difficulty. Translators have to choose which route to follow, and that choice will have ongoing interpretative ramifications.

I attempt to illustrate the impact of these translation approaches by considering alternative options with respect to the extremely well-known verse of John 3:16, when translated into an African language.

The choice of a name for God affects his apparent *foreignness*. Choosing to use 'God' in an African language Bible or theological discussion will have people assume him to have a somewhat 'European' character. Calling him "*Jehovah*" or "*Theo*" will have him appear to be foreign to Africans, with a less-known character than that of 'God'. God's being 'foreign' makes him more distant to the people being reached, but makes it easier for a missionary to define his nature. If an African name such as *Nyasaye* (used in Western Kenya) is used, the African people will build all that they will hear subsequently on elaborate and complex pre-understandings.[26] They may reject a foreign missionary's teaching on *Nyasaye*, on the basis that their people know him better than do the missionaries.

The *Dholuo* (an African language from Western Kenya) Bible[27] uses "*wuode ma miderma*" where the English phrase commonly used is "one and only son"[28] (Greek: υἱόν τόν μονογενή).[29] I presume this is because *wuode ma kende* (a more literal translation) implies a problem in a culture in which large families are preferred and someone could be looked down upon for having only one son.[30] The term "*miderma*," while meaning an only son or child,[31] seems these days to be used only for Jesus (personal observation). So, to remove the implication that having an only son implies weakness, the Luo use a term that really implies 'unique' (*miderma*) rather than 'only' (*kende*).

25. Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998), 67.

26. New insights about Nyasaye will be added to their ancient beliefs.

27. Bible, Muma Maler mar Nyasaye: moting'o Muma Machon kod Muma Manyien (Nairobi: Bible Society of Kenya, 1976), (Bible in the Luo language).

28. John 3:16 (New International Version).

29. Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear NRSV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993).

30. Should the only son die, the father is in trouble as he will have no one to fulfill his burial rites and other important roles in the home.

31. Asenath Bole Odaga, *Dholuo-English Dictionary* (Kisumu: Lake Publishers and Enterprises Ltd., 2003). See also Carole A. Capen, *Bilingual Dholuo-English Dictionary Kenya* (Tucson, AZ: Carole A. Capen, 1998).

The turbulence of 'eternal life'[32] in the West arises, at least in part, from its being a scientific puzzle; is eternity where time is not, and how can that be? A strongly-held traditional African belief in the ongoing existence of someone's spirit either in a nether-world or partial re-incarnation[33] does not produce any such turbulence.

To draw from the relevance approach, I will share an example from my recent experience in an African mining community, shortly after a flooding incident killed scores of miners.[34] That "shedding of blood," I was told on a number of occasions, had resulted in more optimism for the miners who remained. This is because evil spirits are said to be satisfied by death, and shed blood is considered to have the power to bring good fortune. There were stories at the same time of sacrifices of children having been made at the mine in an attempt to enhance its productivity. Killing of a son by a father is recognized in some African witchcraft circles[35] as a means to improve wider family interests. All these thoughts would be very foreign to the mind of a typical Westerner. To have an equivalent impact to that of John 3:16 in the West, this link between Christ's death and child-sacrifice would need to be countered (if possible). Alternative options in translation methodology clearly have profound impacts on Christological, Trinitarian and other doctrinal positions.

3. Some Suggestions as to the Nature of Appropriate Biblical Interpretation

In the light of the above, recommendations can be made regarding the most appropriate principles of cross-cultural Biblical interpretation:

a. In order to achieve comparability in a shrinking multicultural world, I suggest that translators make greater efforts at following the word order and sentence structure of original texts, even with the loss of grammatical flow in the target language. This is especially important in the case of translations, such as in English, if they could end up being used by people of many different native languages/cultures.

b. Already alluded to above is the importance of translating from original Biblical languages, and *not* English or some other language's paraphrases or dynamic equivalence versions.

c. Heavy reliance on computers in Bible translation in non-Western languages should be discouraged. Since computers are expensive exotic machines in much of Africa, they tend to prevent ownership of a translated text and create distance between translators and target audiences. Computers should be consigned to non-field stations, such as at a capital city, a central mission station, etc. Pens and paper are less attractive to thieves and rogues and less invocative of jealousy, as well as more familiar and easy to imitate, circulate, and comprehend.

d. Translators with little cultural knowledge need to be ready to allow for translations which they themselves do not understand. What is clear to indigenous readers may not be so to a foreign translator.

e. Translators should bear in mind that (following the Relevance theory) people will seek understanding through searching for easy-to-process options which have significant impacts. This will involve the application of reason which for many people in the world will be non-scientific in nature.

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32. John 3:16 (New International Version).

33. See for example references to incarnation in Kasongo Munza, "A Letter to African about Africa," unpublished document (2005).

34. Mererani in Manyara Province of Tanzania in April 2008.

35. Arthur Magezi, "Dealing with Issues of 'Superstitions'," A lecture given at Kima International School of Theology, Kenya, during "The Spiritual Emphasis Week," (2006).

f. Translators should avoid favoring themselves and their own people or culture.

g. Domestication may or may not be a help in translation. Retaining foreign phrases or clumsy grammar ensures that listeners/readers appreciate that they are receiving something exotic which requires careful interpretation.

4. Translating People and Projects

Consideration of translation issues should not stop with the Bible. Many more texts are being transported to Africa these days, including educational systems, languages, technological manuals, media broadcasts, recipes, novels, Christian teachings, theologies, and even political ideologies. What is the impact on the African scene?

Because words that make up these materials are dependent for their interpretation on their context (see above), and the context in Africa is unlike that of Europe, text meanings are transformed. Jean and John Comaroff consider the term *modernity*. Because this is firmly rooted among people originating in Europe, "all other modernity's are … mimics of a real thing whose full realization elsewhere is, at best, infinitely deferred (referring to work by Bhabha), at worst, flatly impossible."[36] As a result, "… the various modernity's of African colonies contrasted markedly with modernity at the metropole and with each other…."[37] The apparent movement of modernity from Europe to Africa has made Africa's "violence and magic … scandalously visible," they add.[38] In reference to 'liberalization', "the impact of liberalization on ordinary lives across the continent appears to be persuading more and more people that mysterious forces are at work in the accumulation of wealth and power."[39] Such changes in word meanings are strongly supported by Blunt's research on Kenya: "Africa's occult beliefs have kept pace with Africa's particular forms of modernity."[40] Anthony Balcomb writes that:

> The fruits of the developed world, however, were too powerfully alluring to be ignored. They offered a lifestyle too attractive to be denied. But the relationship between the 'goods' offered in this lifestyle and the means by which these goods could be attained was continuously misunderstood. It was still believed by many that the goods of modernity could be accessed by pre-modern means. This had many manifestations. Two may be cited. One is the Cargo Cult syndrome and the other is witchcraft.[41]

"… the African ability to integrate diverse cultural elements without the contradictions raised by the more dualist thinking of the West," Balcomb goes on to tell us, "… could also provide a hermeneutical key for understanding many of the cultural, political, and religious phenomena of modern Africa."[42] According to Placide Tempels, the "Bantu [a large ethnic group that dominates the population of many African

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36. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Notes on Afro-Modernity and the Neo World Order: An Afterword," in *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a New Liberal Age*, ed. Brad Weiss (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 331.

37. Comaroff and Comaroff, 332.

38. Comaroff and Comaroff, 333.

39. Comaroff and Comaroff, 340.

40. Robert Blunt, "Satan is an Imitator: Kenya's Recent Cosmology of Corruption," in *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a New Liberal Age*, ed. Brad Weiss (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 304.

41. Anthony O. Balcomb, "Modernity and the African Experience," *Bulletin for Contextual Theology African Theolog*y 3, no. 2 (1996), http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/mod.htm (accessed September 29, 2004), n.p.

42. Balcomb, n.p.

countries] speak, act, and live as if, for them, beings were forces."[43] Tempels advises us that to study the Bantu on their own terms, "… we must … make a clean sweep of our own psychological concepts."[44] Then we will realize that, "every act … which militates against vital force or against the increase of the hierarchy of the '*Muntu*' is bad."[45] In order to avoid the perpetual widening of the gap between Black and White, says Tempels, "we must devote ourselves to the service of the life which is already theirs."[46]

Tempels also tells us that, "what they [the Bantu, i.e., the Africans] want more than anything else is not improvement of their economic or material circumstances, but recognition of and respect for their full value as men by the Whites."[47] This is where, I suggest, Whites have failed the African people. Instead of taking 'their' approach to life seriously, Whites have ever since Tempels's day been attempting to force Africans to accept their (White) way of looking at the world. This pressure, combined with the African people's desire for "recognition and respect as men" has given them two options. That is, either to stand by the truth of "who they are" and be considered primitive, or overtly acknowledge the White man's ways and be respected, even though that entails living a lie.[48]

 "Our terms can furnish only an approximation to concepts and principles foreign to us," said Tempels.[49] That is, European languages do not have the capacity for accurately describing African religions, beliefs, and philosophies. Hence discussions about African culture, values, and ways of life engaged in using English can only ever be approximations to the 'truth'. Such approximations, often negatively received by native English speakers, have resulted in African scholars publicly denying who they are for the sake of the respect of the West. While African people cannot allow the modern world to pass them by without participating in it, they also cannot participate in it using Western languages without denying a part of who they are. Scholars who deny their heritage for the sake of international respectability return to address, engage with, and share in that 'heritage' when they go home. Refusal to take 'the other' seriously on the part of Western scholarship unfortunately has isolated it from what is happening on the ground in Africa. This is, it seems to me, a *very serious* situation, given the amount of power that the West holds over vast numbers of African people, their countries, and their economies.

Westerners concerned with Africa need to consider very carefully this dilemma. Failure to do so results in a horrific current track record of 'projects' in Africa: "Many projects and investments, especially in the rural areas [of Zambia], are bound to fail," shares Hugo Hinfelaar because of African witchcraft beliefs that are rarely understood by Westerners.[50] A cycle can be seen repeating itself: in order to be considered respect-worthy, Westerners have to assume African people to be the same as themselves. They therefore design projects and interventions on that basis—ignoring the actual nature of the African people. The failure of projects is concealed so as not to reveal the 'difference' that is there in the African culture or way of life, again out of respect. This unfortunately means that the next person who comes along again sets about designing another project by repeating the same blunder. At the root of this is the failure on the part of the West to come to terms with the 'difference'.

43. Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), 51.

44. Tempels, 96.

45. Tempels, 121.

46. Tempels, 179. Tempels's insights are particularly valuable because, although writing some time ago, he had a long-term deep exposure to African people.

47. Tempels, 178.

48. That is, to use language in relation to 'reality' in a different way to that widely accepted by Westerners.

49. Tempels, 39.

50. Hugo Hinfelaar, "Witch-hunting in Zambia and International Illegal Trade," in *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Gerrie Ter Haar (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press Incorporated, 2007), 229–46.

Our discussion of translation has taught us a number of important lessons. Dominant linguistic models in use in the West err in assuming the ability to communicate meaning inter-culturally with the use of words (when in reality meaning arises when words interact with 'contexts', in the very broad sense of the word). This is well illustrated by the ongoing widespread use of the dynamic equivalence model of translation, despite its serious weaknesses. This in turn results in an ongoing self-deception regarding global realities on the part of the West. Such self-deception is *very dangerous* in the current globalized world, resulting in poor decisions being imposed on much of the world's population through the ignorance of powerful Western scholars, and in turn, activists and policy makers. Those representing the 'misunderstood' cultures of the world, meanwhile, are silenced through the inability of English to articulate their concerns, and their (very understandable) need to be respected in the international arena.

5. Western Languages in Africa

While international languages have their place in enabling international communication, their use in closely controlling other linguistic communities is like a cruel bludgeon forcing non-native speakers (especially those of very distant cultures) to accept their own backwardness and forfeit their voice in their own community. In much of Sub-Saharan Africa, country after country has seen no alternative but to adopt European languages to govern their own people.

The accountability of the West for this language dilemma can perhaps be traced through the peculiar formation of African 'nation states'; ex-colonial and other global powers have to date failed to release the African people for self-rule through their ongoing support of the elitist structures that they originally set up.

It is not new for strong nations to conquer weaker ones. What is new, however, is for foreign powers to maintain a strong hold over empires by keeping a grasp on purse strings in the absence of effective authority or human presence long after having supposedly been ousted from political leadership. Such control via faceless bureaucracy from a 'safe' distance (foreign capitals thousands of miles away) when considered in the light of the prior parts of this essay, has been and continues to be a recipe for calamity. A major step toward any solution to this dilemma here proposed—would be the conscious withdrawal (or freeing) from outside support for promoting Western languages in education and governance of (in the cases here considered) African peoples.

Some aspects of foreign control have been enabled by modern technology. Cruel rulers in previous eras had to have a presence in order to exert control. Presence implies familiarity with local languages and contexts, 'visibility' to local people, mutual well-informed cultural and linguistic exchange, and feedback to the 'center' of power. The spread of language and customs through *people* via social and intellectual interaction is a far cry from today's internet-based society, or the ability of publishers to duplicate their efforts into the thousands and millions so that, for example, many African schoolchildren these days are required to learn (foreign) English in their schools, without ever speaking to a native English speaker. The culture needed to interpret the language is not to be seen. The so-called 'independence' of African countries being curtailed by economic dependence forces them into the ongoing use of little-understood languages.

What does it mean to reside in a country dominated by a foreign language? In Kenya, where I have lived since 1993, native languages are relegated to third place behind English (official language) and Kiswahili (national language). (While I have mentioned Kiswahili, its deep roots in African soil and its being very much an oral language means that it has few of the problems of English.) This relegation of local languages to third place discourages people from thinking. Profound or original thoughts in MT (mother tongue) have little or no influence on the (formal) circumstances of life that are dominated by English. Instead, local people are taught to leave the thinking to foreigners. 'Thinking' that is left for the locals to

do is about how to drain foreign resources in their direction, by means often tainted with 'corruption'. Very few Kenyan people can engage effectively by communicating 'on the level' with the international community that is dominating their lives (by having a mastery of English of an international standard). Those who do have a mastery have acquired the ability at great expense and through extensive exposure to Western people and languages (surely with a loss in familiarity with their people's contexts and languages).

Domination by a foreign language kills local initiative. I will give theological training initiatives as an example. Having been teaching and closely involved in a locally based local-language theological training program in Kenya for over 14 years, I observe that we invariably operate under the shadow of powerful foreign competitors. English-language alternatives offer career opportunities with good salary options, prestige, international recognition, free accommodation, good food, formal curricula, a variety of teachers, and all benefits to be gained for those who will accept learning things that are of marginal relevance to their own cultures and own people. (Much of the relevance of Western theological curricula, not to be scoffed at in the 'real' world, arises because internationally recognized languages and knowledge can attract international funding and support.) The local program working in local languages with people who are closely involved in day-to-day church affairs can barely gain respect or prestige as long as foreigners are (economically) imposing their misplaced wisdom as incentives to the more mobile and more able. (One may suppose that people would value that which is of local pertinence over and above the foreign and 'irrelevant'—an assumption that Ericka Albaugh found to be wrong in Cameroon.[51]) In fact, assisted by the 'magical' basis to African life already mentioned above (and below), African people have instead appropriated the 'prosperity gospel' as a means of understanding that God himself stands behind the 'Whites'.[52] It seems clear that capable local people who could be making a place for the church in a diverse 'civil society' in Africa have realized that this is not an option (a 'civil society' is often not there[53]). They are forced instead to remain either within the traditional African worldview, hence continuing in their adherence to funeral/death rituals which are prevalent in much of Africa, or to leave that world and engage in redirecting foreign funds and influence in their direction— much as, in fact, their forefathers did with 'mystical' or 'witchcraft' powers—often by 'corrupt' means.

As alluded to above, the foreign has relevance and impact on local society because it is central to power issues connected with central government and capable of bringing relationships, recognition, and finance from the international community. Locally indecipherable codes that constitute 'foreign oriented debate' are powerful and begin to have a sense of their own. The above discussion (Section 4) has shown African people's orientation to witchcraft/magic, whose category is being expanded to accommodate 'the foreign'. That is, terms, phrases, sentences, and texts that make a certain sense to those with a Western mind are valued in Africa as magical idioms. Powerful they are, as Westerners are strongly accustomed to responding charitably to those who succeed in reflecting back 'their' terms about the world and what is right and wrong.[54] This of course applies inside and outside of the church.

I am presenting a Westerner's perspective on the African scene. One could not expect African people themselves to make the observations above. They are barely visible from 'within'. Hence academia

51. Ericka Albaugh, "Language Choice in Education: A Politics of Persuasion," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, 1 (2007): 1–32.

52. Jim Harries, "Good-by-Default and Evil in Africa," *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 2 (April 2006): 151–64.

53. Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, "Anger as a Metaphor for Witchcraft: The Relation between Magic, Witchcraft and Divination among the Mupun of Nigeria," in *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Gerrie Ter Haar (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press Incorporated, 2007), 143–82.

54. As a student can 'succeed' by telling his teacher what he wants to hear, whether or not the student has understood what is being taught.

cannot allow itself to be multicultural in its inputs if it is to be broad or multicultural in its output. Informed insider-views by Westerners on Africa are rare these days for many reasons (some discussed above), which keep Westerners on the margins of African society.

The failure of 'education' in foreign languages to be self-perpetuating in Africa leaves the West leading the educational field from afar. Formal theological education facilities on the African continent are almost invariably Western-funded, and often Western-managed. This vast complex operation absorbs enormous quantities of time and energy. A concentration of effort is required to push the required knowledge onto the African continent for appropriation by the African people (often funded by scholarships provided by the West). The difficulty of this process increases as levels of education rise. (It is more difficult to offer an MA by extension to an African site than a BA, and so on.) The theological educational effort is precluding alternative options for missionaries, particularly those of actually getting close to the people being reached, operating from understanding, receiving relevant feedback, and therefore getting theological education to a position of relevance where it can become self-propagating. The counterfactual to the current drive to encourage the adoption of Western education in Africa is not 'zero'. That is, removing the requirement for Western educational impact should *not* mean that nothing is put into its place and missionaries go home. An improved mutual understanding between West and non-West could bring fruits that are nowadays 'unknown'.

Western people appear not to realize that teaching someone your language is orienting them to your culture. Teaching African people English is creating and then perpetuating their dependence on native English speaking countries. Unfortunately, such high valuation of the 'foreign' is an excellent way of encouraging people to devalue themselves. Many reasons contribute to the difficulty a non-native will have in competing with a native speaker (other reasons are given above and below in this article). When the president of an African country presents a speech in English, who is he really talking to?[55] And something is wrong when a small foreign child can correct a president of an African country in his own official language.

I pay such attention to political factors to assist missionaries in appreciating how using a Western language in Africa can be supporting oppressive foreign policy decrees emanating from their home countries. This situation in much of Anglophone Africa forcing incompetence on its citizens is surely an infringement of God's will for his people that Christians should not voluntarily support.

Of course, African people stand to gain a lot through learning from 'the West'. People should travel and interact and learn any number of languages. But assisting someone to develop their own language and culture is like 'teaching someone to fish', whereas forcing foreign wisdom onto them in foreign tongues is 'giving them a fish'. This has been proven over and over around the world; the powerful nations of the world today do not operate on borrowed languages.

Other issues closely related to this debate have been discussed in an article called "Language in Education, Mission and Development in Africa: Appeals for Local Tongues and Local Contexts,"[56] which could helpfully be read at this stage. Working in a foreign language not linked at depth with the culture causes confusion—particularly if the language itself is still used by its originators (and therefore cannot successfully be 'appropriated'). Meanwhile, those foreign originators become overconfident and assume the 'foreign' to be 'familiar' to them.

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55. Perhaps he is talking to donors/potential donors instead of his citizens.

56. Jim Harries, "Language in Education, Mission and Development in Africa: Appeals for Local Tongues and Local Contexts," (2007), http://www.redcliffe.org/uploads/documents/Language_in_Education_19.pdf (accessed November 1, 2007).

6. Being Informed in Mission Contexts

Missiological literature containing examples of how churches grow more quickly without Western missionaries (my personal observation that this is a favorite theme) has not prevented continued advocating of tired-out mission methodologies. The implicit problems associated with much of Western missionary activity struck me at my village home in Western Kenya. I realized that the person who could most seriously undermine my ministry would be a fellow Western missionary! My missionary brothers and sisters in Christ who are not very careful in how they use their finances and language—buying people and opening them up (via modern technology) to the vices of the Western world—can be a hazard to those who are seeking to preach Christ *without* the bountiful servings of Western culture.

Missions to unreached peoples, including adherents of Islam, communism, and other religions could have much to learn. The 'underground' church avoids the traps mentioned above. Mission activity among unreached people (on my observation) often does not. An example (filling the gaps myself with some details concealed): A Christian mission operating in a strongly Muslim context sets up a project to teach young women profitable means of dyeing clothes using imported Western technology. This 'project' lured Muslim girls, who were then plied with gospel teaching. It seemed not to be understood that offering such economic freedom to Muslim girls would threaten doting Islamic families concerned for their reputation and careful to protect the chastity of their daughters. Muslims value women's domestic roles.[57] Christianity was coming together with immorality. Could self-respecting fathers allow their daughter to be so allured to an immoral life? Suggesting to the Christians that what they were doing was inappropriate would of course have been interpreted as being an anti-Christian reaction. The only alternative left to the Muslim community was to try to eject this so-called mission group. It is sad when a mission is ejected for being an inducement to immorality.

Instigators of mission initiatives should ask themselves whether what they are doing would be acceptable to a Christian community in the same/related cultural context or ethnic group. Mission personnel should be trained by local Christians to avoid creating inappropriate activities. Foreign missionaries wanting to reach non-believers would be well advised first to work with local Christian churches, especially AICs (African Indigenous Churches) that are closely in tune with deep African culture. I do such work with indigenous churches, but no Islamic-outreach group has ever deigned to ask me for advice or sought an opportunity for mutual assistance. They choose instead, it seems, to plant American or Western churches in African/Muslim contexts even where all neighboring Christian communities are expressing their faith in more African ways. Too few take the time to discover what an African church is actually like.

Outsiders need to be clearly informed before making key decisions affecting numerous people in highly significant ways. Being well informed requires knowledge of local languages that can only be acquired through missionary vulnerability. Such vulnerability typically arises when a missionary embraces 'poverty' in their ministry.[58]

7. Reasons for the Popularity of Inappropriate Missions Methodologies

Why are some of the proposals not in line with mainline missiological practice? First, many people involved in aid, development, or financial provision as well as mission seem not to have realized to what extent such is a trap. In many Western nations, people can make choices in terms of occupation and livelihood. Offering a person a salary that is sufficient to live on in return for a service is not manipulative

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57. David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 95.

58. This is discussed in detail by Fr. Fernando Domingues, "Poverty and Mission," *Service of Documentation and Study of Global Mission* (*SEDOS*), n.d. See especially p. 8, http://www.sedos.org/site/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=97&Itemid=37 (accessed February 27, 2008).

or coercive because someone turning down one offer can find comparable alternatives. That is, people are remunerated according to some reasonable 'free-market' standard for that locality. A difficulty arises if an 'employer' comes from a foreign context in which remuneration rates are much higher than in the country being targeted. To pay someone local rates can seem ridiculous by comparison with rates of pay in his home country. The employer may come under pressure from his home country to pay more. Unfortunately, as soon as rewards for services come to be higher than those set by local market forces, a distortion enters into the organization, which results in corruption and lies. Corruption because people will be ready to pay bribes (in cash or other forms) in order to get the position concerned. Lies because they will find it advantageous not to be truthful (often under family and extended family pressure) to an employer (an ignorant foreigner who appears to have endless sources of money) rather than face being laid off. Once accustomed to a higher salary level, giving up one's position can be calamitous for the person concerned as well as dependents in the extended family, thus making someone very reluctant to resign from a position or very bitter if they are given the shove. People who are 'trapped' in this way cannot be expected to offer advice, no matter how pertinent, given that it threatens the status quo that maintains them.

Offering aid to a community is putting oneself into a 'trap'. Saying "I have $20,000 that I want to give you if you want it" is asking for trouble. The only way to give a community leader (however chosen) the freedom to refuse your offer without potentially getting him/herself into a lot of trouble if they refuse is to make it while sworn to secrecy. (That is assuming that you can be trusted enough to keep the secret.) Should members of the community concerned hear that their leader turned down a generous offer of aid, especially if the money has now instead gone to a neighboring community, the leader concerned will have a serious problem that will certainly cost him popularity and may result in his losing his position altogether unless the leader manages to convince the people that the potential donor is a liar with some heinous hidden agenda—not a response most donors are looking for.[59]

The computer that dominates the West today brings problems through its attuning of the human mind to its mechanical logic. Young people, especially those who are brought up in interaction with computers, are affected by it. They are inclined to apply reasoning they have learned on the computer to Third World problems. Ancient 'wisdom' is thrown out of the window. The logical mind needed to solve computer problems is *not* always the best when it comes to resolving many complex Third World issues.

Western-oriented elites are usually the only people to whom foreigners have access, either because of their geographical location (in the West, in expensive areas of town or as owners of vehicles) and/or because they are the only ones who have a sufficient grasp of Western languages and cultures so as to be able to have sensible conversations with Westerners. When foreign missionaries say they are "speaking to the locals," all too often they are referring to this kind of person. This fact can lead to misrepresentation of the public opinion which ends up creating more misunderstanding between cultures.

Linguistically, someone brought up in one community *can never* understand those of another to the extent of a native-born person. An elite person as described above rarely understands the West with the profundity or the depth of a fellow Westerner. Many African elites fill the gaps in their understanding of the West using their comprehension of 'magic' (i.e., aspects of their culture that are outside of Western worldviews and experience). Such a person is often already in a 'trap' such as the ones mentioned above —their ongoing supply of funds being dependent on them speaking and behaving in certain ways to please their wealthy donors regardless of their actual heart orientation. The same elites often stand to gain the most from aid and donor policiesfor many reasons; not the least of which is that they often own the businesses that handle foreign funds and sell to donors. The elites can support religious positions to justify their stand in relation to donors—such as the 'prosperity gospel'. They can be yes-men. A

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59. Imagine that your boss offers you a raise within earshot of your spouse. What kind of conversation will you have at home later that day if you decide to turn her/him down?

prerequisite for a foreigner to know what the people really want and certainly then to know what will actually help them, is at the very least to learn a local language and interact with a wider populace from a position of economic (and other) vulnerability. That there are *very few* Western Christians doing this today is a disgrace to the church.

Closely related to this and already referred to above is the poor understanding of the translation process by many would-be donors and development experts. Given the close association between 'meaning' and 'context' of the use of words already mentioned above, it should be clear that Westerners cannot understand non-Western people through the use of language alone. The widespread use of the English language today makes native English people, in particular those who are monolingual, especially vulnerable to deception (intentional or otherwise).

So then, why don't Westerners take the trouble to learn the ways of life of the African people? I suggest the following reasons: Firstly, it is difficult. Secondly, quite frankly, they are scared. Moving into another person's culture has many difficulties, usually compounded the greater the gap being bridged. The increasing material and financial dependence of 'normal' lifestyles in the West is creating an ever-widening gap between the Western and the non-Western world. The reputation of Africa as a missionary graveyard, as infested with malaria, fierce wild animals and snakes, frequent bloodshed and war, hunger, famine, and extreme poverty deters many Westerners from desiring close fellowship with African communities. Hence the myth that one can 'help' distant peoples while living in one's comfortable home, sitting at one's computer console, using one's own language, and through studying theoretical issues in local universities with just occasional dramatic adventurous excursions into foreign climes, is extremely popular.

Summary and Conclusion

This article assumes the meaning of words to arise from the *context* of their use. This under-realized truth forms the basis for a critique of the dynamic equivalence theory of translation, particularly in inter-cultural perspective; foreign texts are found to communicate a foreign culture, over and above their intended content. A brief examination of alternatives illustrates that dynamic equivalence is far from the only option available to translators. Other options include translation based on function, description, turbulence, relevance, power-interests, domestication or its avoidance, and so on. A short list of specific recommendations is given to Bible translators.

The questions raised on translation are pertinent to all areas of intercultural communication. Serious weaknesses in prior translation practices in projects, policies, and diverse kinds of international and intercultural exchanges are considered. Careful examination of the economic and power implications of missionary actions, drawing on the author's own practical experience, leads to the suggestion that it is immoral to force dependency on unworkable language policies onto African people. Because this practice aggravates problems, the church needs to distance itself from it. The importance of this is emphasized for real mission contexts. Because communication with locals is hindered by the religious stand-off of frontier mission situations, misunderstandings are particularly likely to arise in mission to unreached people. The peculiar economic dynamics arising from inter-cultural mission relationships between the non-West and the West are shown as being largely responsible for perpetuation of the negative and unhelpful practices mentioned above. Western missionary vulnerability and linguistic acumen are advocated as the means for overcoming them.

The limitations in popular wisdom regarding language and translation found in this article suggest the need for an urgent turn-around in twenty-first-century missionary practices. Contrary to popular wisdom and perhaps outward appearance, discovery of a key to the resolution of Sub-Saharan African problems will require operating from within the African cultural milieu and languages concerned. Just as God

became man in a specific culture at a specific time and manifested Himself within the confines of that culture, so 'solutions' must be 'incarnated' from within the structures and language of a people for them to be truly Christian, whether in terms of translations or wider societal concerns. To seek a solution from the throes of Western academia in European languages is to postpone the call for African people to come to terms with their own ways of life and position in the world. Such postponement, if it continues to detract attention from key issues to its own misguided solutions, could spell catastrophe for African societies in the years ahead.