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Aspects of Linguistic Functionalism in Bible Translation. Some Trends in the Contemporary Canonical Hungarian Bible Translations²

Abstract.

There are several Hungarian translations of the Bible serving at the same time: Translations are re-translations of the same text using revisions of ancient Bible texts. The language of the Bible should be “natural”, helping readers to comprehend it with the least effort. This effort is driven by direct and indirect translations showing more or less functional approaches to translation presenting texts by using methods of formal and functional equivalence. The paper provides a glimpse into contemporary canonical Hungarian translations, revealing the linguistic ideologies of the translator and the needs of the reader (in what manner linguistic ideologies have influence on the translation). Translation approaches are going to be “scaled” in the

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microstructure, showing possibilities of research to be done in the macrostructure of the translations. Examples are shown to reveal the intentions of the translator(s) helping readers to grasp the meaning of the source text.

Keywords: Bible translation, functionalism, translation studies, Bible, language ideologies

1. Bible Translation

There are numerous definitions for Bible translation, stressing several aspects of the translation process or the social background (e.g. spiritual-historical, translational-linguistic, or religious-theological). In my conception, Bible translation is a cultural transmission through language where the target-language text is produced as a translation mediated through the translators' hermeneutic interpretation or through the principles of the translation studies they apply. As the linguistic or interpretative problems affecting the translator are quite diverse,³ the equivalence of the translated text can be achieved at different levels. Bible translation is a complex process, as translators must be good both at translation theories and at the practical level. As Naudé states, a translator without knowledge of translation studies is “similar to a ghost without a sheet or a corn-cob without kernels – useless or at least not very effective”.⁴

Bible translation is undoubtedly a linguistic discipline, but because of the complexity of the source text, it cannot be translated without the knowledge of theology, history, or even hermeneutics. As Nord points out in one of her studies, “Bible translation is traditionally in the hands of theologians, whose *focus is on the meaning* of the source text

³ See NAUDÉ, Jacobus (2010): Religious Translation. In: Gambier, Yves – van Doorslaer, Luc (eds.): *Handbook of Translation Studies 1*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins. 285–293. LANSTYÁK István – HELTAI Pál (2012): Universals in Language Contact and Translation. In: *Across Languages and Cultures*. 13, 1. 99–121. LANSTYÁK István (2013): A Károli-biblia 20. és 21. századi revízióinak néhány kérdéséről. In: *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*. 15, 2. 3–34.

⁴ NAUDÉ, Jacobus (2021): Translation Studies and Bible Translation. Interview on BT List Live. In: *Journal for Translation Studies in Africa*. 2, 1. 10.

rather than *on what modern readers are able to understand*” [emphasis added].⁵ Bible is “constructed” of several books – being written in several ages, against several historical and political backgrounds, and in several styles: this high complexity must be reflected in translations if these differences are important for the translator and for the target-language society. This also means there are several levels of equivalence between translations (may those be inter- or intralinguistic). In this regard, at least the following types of equivalence can be reached: *motivational equivalence* (transferring the motivation of words, phrases, and structures used as equivalents in the target language from the source language), *denotative equivalence* (some level of transposition of the denotative meaning fields of words, phrases, and structures used as equivalents in the target language from those used in the source language), *connotative equivalence* (some level of transposition of the connotative meaning fields of words, phrases, and structures used as equivalents in the target language from those used in the source language – this can be reached e.g. with figurative language), *stylistic equivalence* (transposition of the stylistic value of words, phrases, and structures used as equivalents in the target language from those used in the source language – this type of equivalence has a great impact on the receptivity of the target text), *pragmatic equivalence* (transposition of the pragmatic meaning of words, phrases, and structures used as equivalents in the target language from those used in the source language), *structural equivalence* (as part of the formal equivalence, the transposition of the form and structure of words, phrases, and structures used as equivalents in the target language from those used in the source language), *textual equivalence* (transfer of macro-level – textual, contextual, cultural – meanings from the source language text). Differences between translations can be measured on the scale of the above-mentioned equivalence types. The translation is not only predictable code switching, a transfer of meaning with the help of linguistic tools, but rather a constant game of aims and meanings of the translator to achieve readability in the target community.

This play of translators reached a modern linguistic acceptance only in the 1960s with the help of James S. Holmes, and it was applied by Eugene A. Nida to Bible translation. Nida, based on his experience in translation, formed the well-known distinction between

⁵ NORD, Christiane (2016): Function + Loyalty: Theology Meets Skopos. In: *Open Theology*. 2, 1. 566.

formal and dynamic (or functional) equivalence. Nida's theory on the functionality of the translation was built upon the sociolinguistic approach, namely on the functional aspects of the translation in the target society. According to this perception, functionality of the translation should follow the needs of the target community and not the aspects of the source text.

Bible translation as an intralingual or interlingual *transmission of cross-cultural knowledge* is bridging a gap between the source text and the target community. It can also be accepted as a tool for *preventing or solving communicational problems* having their roots in the lack of common language between the two partners. Translators in conveying the message of the Bible have to take into consideration several textual and contextual elements – from the elements of the source text to the cultural bounds and contextual knowledge of readers.

Sociolinguistic aspects bring extralinguistic dimensions of the source and target text into the focus of the translation process. As translation is a “purposeful activity” (allusion to Hans J. Vermeer and Christiane Nord), translators of the functionalist approach focus on the production of the target text – the balance is placed on the target text opposite the direct translation of relevance theory. As Vermeer points out, “[e]very translation is directed at an intended audience since to translate means ‘to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances’”.⁶ The most influential functional approach in Bible translation theory is the so-called Skopos theory, which is aimed at the careful analysis of the target text and target audience, as well as the applied social and cultural norms in the target text (the functional approach of the Skopos theory has been brought up by Hans J. Vermeer and Christiane Nord). It is important that the translation is dependent on its function⁷ as a text “implanted” in the target culture although there is still the alternative of either preserving the original function of the source text or of changing the function to adapt to the specified needs of the target community.⁸

⁶ NORD, Christiane (2018): *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. New York, Routledge. 12.

⁷ About functions in the process of Bible translation, see NORD 2016, 571–579.

⁸ SNELL-HORNBY, Mary (2006): *The Turns of Translation Studies. New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?* Amsterdam – Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company. 52.

Functionality has always been present in the translation process, but as a theoretical approach, it came into the foreground in the Skopos theory by taking into consideration the text functions described by Roman Jakobson. Text functions depend not only on the textual but also on the extratextual, or pragmatic, factors linking the source text to the culture of the target community. Because of the text functions and the linguistic and social norms, in order for the translator to achieve a working text with certain (pragmatic) functions in the target culture, his/her task is not just to “replace textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL)”. However, to make a target text “work”, functionality must take into consideration *the ideologies of translators and readers*.

2. Functionalism through Language Ideologies

Translation is a complex process where meaning is generated through the semantic, grammatical, or sociocultural decoding steps of the source text with the “joint work” of the translator and the reader.⁹ Meaning is built up by a joint process of the translator and the reader, and it consists of several layers, for example, the *denotative*, or *situative*, *meaning* or the *sociocultural meaning* formed in a target community.

The complex procedure of translation relies on the precise (and functional) conversion of basic structural units found in the source language. Reproducing the meaning and style structure of the source text is carried out through the language-specific syntactic constructs and the translator’s strategies aiming at domesticating the source text. The complexity of the Bible is strengthened by contextual and stylistic diversity: the translation must pay attention to genre-specific, stylistic features at the micro and macro levels. As the functional aspect of the translation process comes into the foreground, the translator must cope with the implicit, sociocultural meanings of the source texts to give answers to the questions raised by the reader; they must mediate straightforward content to all recipients – in any language.

⁹ See: VAN DER WATT, Jan G. – KRUGER, Yolande (2002): Some Considerations on Bible Translation as Complex Process. In: *Acta Theologica, Supplementum*. 2, 22. 1. 118–139.

The translation of sacred texts requires special grounding or preparation from the translator, but the main difficulties of translation arise from the sacredness of the source text and the sociocultural differences between the source and target community. Mediation of culture rewords the knowledge linked to a special society or group into another language, whilst the aim should be customization to the needs or knowledge of the target group.

Managing functions of the Bible in the translation process is not straightforward. The Bible itself contains texts of several styles, forms, and registers, forcing translators not to stick to only one strategy. The normativity of sacred texts also plays an important role in this process, as normative or descriptive translation produces different texts not only in grammar but also in meaning. Hence, the Bible is a text not easily accessible to all readers. Good translation tends towards descriptive and explanatory texting while preserving certain aspects of normativity. Translation of sacred or religious texts can be regarded as the transmission of culturally bound contexts revealed through certain hermeneutical interpretations written in a language that can be easily accepted by the readers. The aim of the translator should be to meet the requirements of several target groups either by paraphrasing or by word-for-word translation – however, it is essential to keep the stylistic characters of the source text: it contains several types and genres of texts, but the inspiration and sublimity of the source should remain.

If one claims translation is an intercultural knowledge transfer, problems during the translation process seem to be linked to the content, its interpretation, transformation, and its presentation (functional approach can be one solution, but there are groups for whom formal equivalence is the only adequate form of translation). Deriving from the theories of Bible translation published by István Lanstyák, it is noteworthy that the translation of sacred texts can be divided into problems or *characteristics of the translator* and *the reader*. In this regard, the gist of the problem lies in the lack of common cultural knowledge (or background) and language. In this process, functionalism means its accommodation to the needs of the target community.

During the interlingual translation process, translators work at least with two texts, being influenced by linguistic ideologies from at least two languages. It is worth mentioning that linguistic ideologies do have an effect not only on occasional translators but also on more confident, professional translators.¹⁰ However, translation means reception

¹⁰ For a detailed description, see LANSTYÁK – HELTAI, 2012.

and interpretation: accepting the needs of the target community, composing structures of meaning, or choosing the equivalents are factors that always show the personal characteristics of the translator. The recipients, the readers are influenced mostly by ideologies of the target language, but readers knowing both languages can also be influenced by ideologies of both languages. It is true that the translator and the reader can see the text from different perspectives, which can result in different interpretations of the same text.

To understand the complexity of the translation process, we should get to know the basic ideologies, which can be seen as *language ideologies* (resulting from the linguistic difference between the source text and target text) and as *translation ideologies* (resulting from the cultural difference between the source text and target text) – being on both sides of the communication chain.

One of the typical *linguistic ideologies of the translator* is *linguistic formalism*. This ideology builds theoretically on the perfectionism of the source text resulting in assumptions that the original meaning of the source text can be mediated only by keeping most of the contextual, stylistic, or other textual features of the source text. According to this ideology, the accuracy of the translation is driven by the level of precision in mirroring the grammatical structures of the source text, which is in accordance with the notions of formal equivalence. As language is a set of continuously changing elements (forms and meanings), and the morphological and syntactic structures in one language differ from the one in another language, the presence of linguistic structures of the source language in the target text usually makes the target text harder to understand. It is still not easy to decide on the usefulness of this ideology because a certain level of archaism to be found and kept in sacred texts can be regarded as a stylistically relevant part such texts, creating exotextual characteristics of it. An accurate interpretation of the text can be affected by both formal and dynamic equivalence.¹¹ Linguistic formalism has only a minor role in functionalism, as functional approaches tend to recompose the text according to the needs of pragmatic competence of the target audience.

¹¹ See: RYKEN, Leland (2004): *Bible Translation Differences*. Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books. DAZDAREVIC, Samina – MILOVANOVIC, Ana Stisovic – FIJULJANIN, Fahreta (2013): *Translating Sacred Words. 5th International Social Sciences Conference in Balkans*, Sakarya University, Turkey, International University of Novi. 6.

Functionalism means translating the source text according to the (cognitive, cultural, contextual) needs of the target community, which can differ not only in language groups but also in the social and cultural groups of one language. Applying functional aspects in translation does not mean “adjusting” the text only to the target community but also to the stylistic and other textual characteristics used in the target group. It means that the genre, style, and register of the sacred text can determine the strategies of the translator. The meaning of words and phrases is not merely denotative, as it can also be connotative – so, translation meanings and interpretation can depend on the type and style of the source text. As van der Watt and Kruger point out, layers of the accurate meaning of biblical texts can be deepened by the interaction of the translator and the reader, but the meanings of mere words are always determined by the sophisticated interaction of the reader and the macro-structure of the text.¹²

Accurate and precise rendering of meanings encoded in the Bible is difficult. The actual meaning can be driven by the style or contextual elements, but the time gap between the age of composing the original and the one of reading the translations makes the whole process of comprehension more difficult. This work can be helped by the knowledge of the *explicit* and *implicit references* (Bible commentaries are useful in this clarifying process of the Bible).

The role of the translator is to mediate an ancient text in a different sociocultural surrounding. This helps the reader to easily reveal the important connections and meanings from the text. Words like *bread*, *vine*, and *rock* in the texts “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35), “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.” (John 15:1), or ‘For you are my rock and my fortress’ (Psalms 31:) surely had another meaning for the people living in the Palestinian desert than for somebody in the modern era. Or in John 7:52 “They replied, ‘Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.’” – to reveal the message, a deeper social and contextual background should be known or encoded in the text (in Hungarian translations, the word ‘arise’ is translated as *támad*, which can be a shorter form of *támadott fel* or a synonym for *származik*, being closer to ‘arise’; only in Lajos Csia’s easy-to-read translation, being closer to a simplified language, is it written “Galileából nem származott próféta!” where *származik*, a more

¹² VAN DER WATT – KRUGER 2002, 122.

common meaning is used. Again: the language of the Bible is always more “ancient” than the one used in the community.).

It is indisputable that communication between text and reader can be fluent only by certain social and geographical knowledge. To help this communication, translators must clarify not only the implicit information structure but also the more visible references and allusions: at this point, we can agree that, for example, the allegory of *vine* and *shepherd* in the New Testament cannot be revealed without the complex interpretation (or, at least, the knowledge) of meanings to be found in the Old Testament. By the implicit cultural context, the translator must also pay attention to the explicit references: when referring to archaisms (geographical names, currencies, units of measurement, names of social positions, etc.), the target text will not be the same during the use of formal equivalence (for example, by using footnotes) and dynamic equivalence (for example, by using content generally known by modern readers).

The formal structure of Biblical texts can also influence the meaning. Translators can also form the meaning of the written text through the letters, characters, or punctuation. This problem of recognition is not a problem of the new era – the original Hebrew and Aramaic texts were written without capitalization and punctuation (translators started to use punctuation and capitalization in the Greek translations dated to the 7th century¹³). Just like punctuation, formation of biblical texts into smaller elements like sentences and paragraphs can also serve as interpretation.

The meanings of smaller textual units (smaller texts, paragraphs) get their final meaning at the macro level, so the actual meaning of a bigger textual unit can be revealed only after the interpretation of the smaller unit. Translation, however, is done at the micro level, so meaning at the macro level can easily change (*inaccuracy of translation*). Because of the differences between languages, the equivalence of a certain meaning can differ, resulting in the fact that an accurate rendering of a meaning found in the source text is difficult or impossible in the target language. That happens when the target text can have several interpretations. Consequently, during the translation process, meanings can be lost or new meanings can be added to the untouchable original text and meaning.

¹³ See: METZGER, Bruce (1993): Persistent Problems Confronting Bible Translators. In: *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 150, 3. 278.

Besides the equivalence in the content and form in the case of the Bible, we must take care of the aesthetic equivalence.¹⁴ By rendering the aesthetic level of the text, the translated text can preserve its three dimensions: the aesthetic, formal, and contextual dimensions. Rendering the equivalence in the aesthetic dimension is a complex process, since it is usually present in the source text like a smooth connection of formal and contextual elements, mostly linked to certain languages. Formal elements are linked to grammatical constructions resulting in differences in languages. For that reason, the rendering of the aesthetic equivalence is awkward: its absence in the source text results in a two-dimensional, *flat* text.

3. Functionalism Meets Translation Theories

Functional approaches were not invented in the twentieth century, although the so-called “functionalism” theory was formed at that time. Functionalism – as the translational approach taking into consideration the needs of the target community – has always been a concern for translators (beginning with the famous Cicero). One of the first major theories focusing on readers was Eugene Nida’s sociolinguistic approach, where he distinguishes between the faithful reproduction of source-text form elements (formal equivalence) and the denoting equivalence of communicative effect (dynamic equivalence), where he stressed the purpose of translation, the function of the translator and of the receivers, and, most of all, the cultural implications of the translation process. In his conception, the translator’s task is to place the source text in the cultural and pragmatic context of the source community. While functional equivalence focuses on the function of the form as well as the meaning of the source text and defines the aim of translation as the translation’s ability to replicate these rhetorical, stylistic, and sociolinguistic functional features as closely as possible, the functionalist theory and translation practice focus not on the function of the source text but on the effect of the translation in the recipient.

¹⁴ For more on this, see: NEWMARK, Peter (1988): *A Textbook of Translation*. New York, Prentice Hall. 42.

Nida's turn to the source community and text was followed by several cultural approaches in translation, from which Gideon Toury's cultural turn must be mentioned. With Descriptive Translation Studies, Toury brought the social context and the norms of the target community into the scope of translation. Toury opened discussions of translation as a "socially contexted behaviour"¹⁵ and stressed the importance of norms in the translation process. He (alongside Andrew Chesterman) worked out a systemic background of translation norms, where he calls translation a norm-governed activity.¹⁶ As a background of the translation process, functions are connected to the norms: at first to the *preliminary norms*, where social, ideological, political, but also textual-stylistic norms are concerned, then to *initial norms*, where translators focus on the adequacy of the target text (not on the source-text norms) or to norms originating in the target culture determining the translation's acceptability, and to *operational norms*, which direct the decisions made during the act of translation itself, where textual-linguistic norms in choosing the adequate form appear.¹⁷

The Skopos theory proposed by Hans J. Vermeer, and later referred to as the "theory of functionalism", focuses on the *communicative purpose* of the translational action, placing the target community into the light of the translation process. According to this theory, if it is the *receiver who decides on the functionality* of a text, a text producer cannot be sure that a text will actually accomplish the communicative purpose for which it is produced. For that reason, it is important *to make a distinction* between purpose, or intention, on the sender's side and function on the receiver's side.¹⁸ In the case of Bible translation, it is *impossible to make the sender's intention to text function for the target readers*. As it is also described in the Descriptive Translation Studies, the translator must follow the needs of the receiver, so the connection between the translator and the reader is based on the aim (purpose, *skopos*) of the translation, where aims should be defined through the view of the reader. One can say there is a step forward to the reader – from

¹⁵ SCHÄFFNER, Christina (2010): Norms of Translation. In: Gambier, Yves – van Doorslaer, Luc (eds.): *Handbook of Translation Studies 1*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins. 236.

¹⁶ See: TOURY, Gideon (1995): *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam – Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company. 56.

¹⁷ See TOURY 1995, 53–69 or SCHÄFFNER 2010, 235–244.

¹⁸ See NORD 2016.

Nida’s formal equivalence to some kind of “adoration” of the reader (e.g. with language use accommodated to the target community). Focusing on the main linguistic functions defined by Roman Jakobson (as the phatic, referential, expressive, and appellative functions) can cause loss in the semantic, syntactic, or textual functions of the source text. For that reason, the translator should bear in mind that there are several types of equivalencies between texts – and choose the proper one to use.

Translation can be viewed as an object-oriented *process* – if the translator knows the target group, s/he can set the proper rules of translation, helping readers in perception. But knowing the source text and the characteristics of the target society, the object of a translation (the process itself) is not straightforward; it can be achieved by following several aims:

- the pragmatic-communicative circumstances (situation),
- the functions of the text (aesthetic or appellative function),
- the target group itself (readers).

If the translation, the retranslation of the Bible follows various aspects of a single aim, the same text can be translated in several ways: for example, as a sacred text or just as an informative text. The following example (Gen 1–5) illustrates the aesthetic function of the text (repeating the conjunction ‘and’ (in Hungarian: *és*) or avoiding it in order to make an informative text, like in the simplified Hungarian translation, in EFO).

Table 1. *Differences between aesthetic and informative function*

	Gen 1–5
ESV	In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.

RKG	<p>Kezdetben teremté Isten az eget és a földet. A föld pedig kietlen és puszta vala, és setétség vala a mélység színén, és az Isten Lelke lebeg vala a vizek felett. És monda Isten: Legyen világosság: és lőn világosság. És látá Isten, hogy jó a világosság; és elválasztá Isten a világosságot a setétségtől. És nevezé Isten a világosságot nappalnak, és a setétséget nevezé éjszakának: és lőn este és lőn reggel, első nap.</p>
EFO	<p>Kezdetben teremtette Isten az eget, a földet és mindent, ami égen-földön létezik. A föld kaotikus, lakatlan és üres volt, a mélységet sötétség borította be. De Isten Szelleme ott lebegett a mélységes vizek fölött. Parancsolt Isten: „Legyen világosság!” – és fölragyogott a világosság. Akkor Isten megvizsgálta a világosságot, és örömét lelte benne. Majd elválasztotta a világosságot a sötétségtől. Azután elnevezte a világosságot nappalnak, a sötétséget pedig éjszakának. Majd leszállt az este, azután felvirradt a reggel – ez volt az első nap.</p>

4. Functionalism through Some Examples

The focus of this analysis is revealing some aspects of the functional approach in Bible translation – with special emphasis on the Hungarian translations. For this purpose, lexemes and verses are going to be compared – and as an aid, the *Egyesített Bibliolvasó* (Unified Bible Reader, ebo.kre.hu) offering Hungarian Bible translations will be used for text analysis. As linguistic functionalism *means bringing the meaning of the source text closer to the reader* (using the four basic functions of the language: referential, expressive, appellative, and phatic), several retranslations of the same source text can be used in parallel.

A translation of a Bible should not be influenced by any other translation of the same language: in the case of Hungarian translations, the first complete translation was published in 1590 and was conducted by Gáspár Károli (the so-called Vizsoly Bible). In retranslation, there is already a source text, and the translation is based on an existing translation or more translations. In retranslation, other versions in the target language are re-used – whenever new translation ideologies were emerged, there were changes in the standard variety or to avoid the existing translation methods and apply new ones.

In retranslation, the source version of the text is not important, as the emphasis is on the new version, on translation. During revision, the newly translated text is created primarily in contrast (or in relation) to an existing one. In the course of revision, a new translation is produced by reading and observing the text of the translation to be revised. Differences between retranslation and revision are not necessarily obvious or visible from the point of view of the final result. The close relationship between retranslation and revision is also shown by the fact that the purpose of a translation (revision or retranslation) may change during the translation process. As an example, there is the Hungarian Protestant translation published by the Hungarian Bible Society in 1970, which was published as a translation, but its works were started as a revision, and its renewal came to light in 1990 – as a revision.

Due to functional aspects and easier readability, newer Hungarian translations have more in common with the secular language use (e.g. having fewer metaphorical elements from the source text), bringing the Hungarian “Bible language” closer to the standard variety of Hungarian. In contrast to this, the language use of Hungarian Bible translations still remains a specialized language for sacred texts. At the same time, its specialized linguistic character is reinforced by the style (and even by the diversity and richness of styles) and the thematic-cultural binding on the one hand and by the theoretical issues and problems related to the creation and translation of texts on the other. We can agree with Gergely Hanula in that there are still differences between the sacred language of Hungarian Bible translations and vernacular language (even in the EFO, the simplified translation). Firstly, the permanence of sacred texts (the subject and object of the Bible are the same in all translations regardless of the time of translation) and the limitations of the sacred language (lexical, syntactic, and semantic constraints in the respective languages – even if there is a slight shift towards the standard variety of Hungarian, there are still patches of specialized language use), in the obscurity of the meanings it covers (there is always some mystification in the content) and in its renunciation of individual intention (the individuality of the translator or reader is eliminated by the community), together they create a sense of strangeness or sense or inspiration.¹⁹

¹⁹ HANULA Gergely (2016): *Anyaszentnyelvünk. A „szent nyelvek” és a fordítás*. Budapest, Argumentum Kiadó – ELTE BTK Vallástudományi Központ. 102.

According to Hanula, the sacredness of any Bible translation is made not by the language or the language use but rather by its use: the more uniform the target language versions, the stronger the authority of the language, its “sacred” character. The situation where texts are read make the Bible’s language sacred – let it be old or new translations. In Hungarian tradition, this is clearly evident in the 1908 revision of the Károli Bible, the text of which still determines more recent translations and is still in use today.²⁰ Readability as a function can be seen in this particular translation: as it is still used today, the Hungarian Bible Society prepared its “linguistic refreshing”, where mostly syntactic and morphological modifications were done, leaving the lexis as it was in its publication.

Although Hungarian is a language spoken by only cc. 17 million speakers (from whom 9 million speakers live in Hungary), there are several Bible translations, retranslations, and revisions made for several religions. Translations used nowadays were made in the 20th century²¹ and can be examined at least according to the formality of the translation and according to the modernity of the language used in the translation. According to András Szalai, Hungarian Bible translations can be characterized as follows:²²

²⁰ See: M. PINTÉR Tibor – P. MÁRKUS Katalin [under publication]: The Role of Online Bible Readers in Biblical Concordance Making. In: *Hungarian Studies Yearbook*.

²¹ For an extensive overview of Hungarian Bible translations, see: BOTTYÁN, János (2009): *A magyar Biblia évszázadai*. Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó. For a good overview of the methods and goals of translation made, see: FABINY Tibor – PECSUK Ottó – ZSENGELLÉR József (2014): *Felebarát vagy embertárs. Bibliafordítások és használatuk a mai Magyarországon*. Budapest, Luther Kiadó – Kálvin Kiadó – Hermeneutikai Kutatóközpont.

²² The first Hungarian translation of the whole Bible was printed in 1590, and the first major revision of it was done in the early 1900s and was published in 1908. The language of this translation was rather odd in the time of its preparation, but it is still easy to read and comprehend in the 21st century (as the language of the translation published in 1590 is still readable and understandable).

Table 2. *Linguistic characteristics of the Hungarian Bible translations*²³

	very formal	rather formal	formal and dynamic (functional)	rather dynamic	very dynamic
very old	RKG (1908)			Budai (1967)	

²³ For the bibliographic data of the translations see the References. The table (based on: SZALAI, András (2019). *Bibliafordítás és a bibliafordítások* (v.5. 2019.01.07.)) contains the Hungarian abbreviations and names used for the translations and their date of the latest published version. The bibliographic data of the translations are:

Békés–Dalos = BÉKÉS Gellért – DALOS Patrik (2014): *Újszövetségi Szentírás* [New Testament]. Pannonhalmi Főapátság (first published in Rome, 1951);

Budai = BUDAI Gergely (1967): *Az Új Testámentom* [New Testament];

Czeglédy = CZEGLÉDY Sándor (1924): *Újtestamentum* [New Testament];

Csia = CSIA, Lajos (1987): *Az Újszövetség* [New Testament]. (first published in Austria, 1978);

EFO = Egyszerű fordítás [Simplified Translation] (2012. WBTC / Nemzetközi Biblia Liga);

RKG = Szent Biblia Azaz Istennek Ó És Új Testamentomában Foglaltatott Egész Szent Írás. [Revision of the Bible made under Károly Szász] (1908) Brit és Külföldi Bibliatársulat;

Kecskeméthy = KECSKEMÉTHY István (2009): *Újszövetség* [New Testament] (1931), Biblia [Bible] (2009). CE Koinónia Kiadó;

KNV = *Ó- és Újszövetségi Szentírás a Neovulgata alapján* [Old and New Testament according to the Neovulgate] (1997). Szent Jeromos Bibliatársulat;

Masznyik = MASZNYIK Endre (1925): *Új Testámentom azaz: Istennek Új Szövetsége a mi Urunkban a Jézus Krisztusban* [New Testament]. Pozsony;

Raffay = RAFFAY Sándor (1929): *Újtestamentum* [New Testament]. Budapest: Luther-Társaság;

Ravasz = RAVASZ László (1998): *A puszta létnél többet. Az Új Testamentum* [New Testament] (first published in 1971). Gedeon Társaság;

RÚF = Biblia – *Revideált új fordítású* [New Revision] (2014), Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó – Magyar Bibliatársulat;

Simon = SIMON Tamás László (2015): *Újszövetség* [New Testament]. Pannonhalmi Főapátság;

SZIT = Biblia – *Őszövetségi és Újszövetségi Szentírás* (2005). Szent István Társulat (first published in 1973, later in 1995);

ÚFO = *Biblia – Új protestáns fordítás* [New Protestant Translation] (1990), Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó – Magyar Bibliatársulat;

ÚRK = *Újonnan revideált Károli Biblia* [Newly Revised Version] (2017): Veritas Kiadó (first published in 2012);

Vida = VIDA, Sándor: *Újszövetségi Szentírás* [New Testament] (1993), VikArt Bt. (first published in 1971).

Most common Hungarian Bible translations.

	very formal	rather formal	formal and dynamic (functional)	rather dynamic	very dynamic
rather old		Czeglédy (1924) Raffay (1929) Kecskeméthy (2009) Ravasz (1998)	Masznik (1925)		
rather modern than old	Csia (1997) Vida (1993)	ÚRK (2011)	ÚF (1990) RÚF (2014)		
modern			SZIT (2005) KNV (1997)	Simon (2015)	Békés–Dalos (2014)
very modern					EFO (2012)

As the main goal of this study is to reveal some aspects of functionality in contemporary translations, the characteristics of the chosen Hungarian translations will be not discussed. The aim of this study is to give an overview of the translation process and to reveal some aspects of functionality, namely the importance of interpretation in denotative and connotative meaning and of the descriptive function.

To do so, let us see the significant differences of interpretation, for example, in verse 1 of Psalm 126.

The functional approach can be seen here as the differences in the conception of the word ‘ascent’ where in the title translations use equivalents of several scales of explicitation, bringing the text closer to the modern reader: *Grádicsok éneke* ‘Song of the Stairs’ ~ *Zarándokének* ‘Pilgrim’s Song’ ~ *A templomba felvezető ének* ‘Song leading up to the temple’. In these examples, not only the title but also the verb phrase in the first part of the sentence (*visszahozta* ‘brought back’, *megfordította* ‘turned’, *hazavezette* ‘led home’, *jóra fordította* ‘turned for good’) – and also the English translations – proves the different concepts, aims of the translator.

Table 3. *A closer meaning*

	Psalm 126:1
NKJV	A Joyful Return to Zion A Song of Ascents. When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream .
ESV	Restore Our Fortunes, O Lord A Song of Ascents. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream .
RKG	Grádicsok éneke. Mikor visszahozta az Úr Sionnak foglyait, olyanok voltunk, mint az álmodók .
SZIT	A hazatérők éneke (Zarándokének.) Amikor az Úr hazavezette Sion foglyait, úgy tűnt, hogy álmodtuk az egésztest .
RÚF	Az Úr nagy tetteinek dicsérete Zarándokének. Mikor jóra fordította Sion sorsát az ÚR, olyanok voltunk, mint az álmodók .
EFO	„ A Templomba felvezető ének. ” Mikor az Örökkévaló visszahozta a foglyokat a száműzetésből Sionba, azt hittük, álmodunk!

Functionalism in translation can be achieved with several solutions: for example, the language use of modern translations is closer to secular language use (its tangible sign is, for example, the reduction of metaphorical elements and images), which results in that the gap between sacral language and the standard language variety is constantly widening. On the contrary, the LSP character is strengthened by the vocabulary and style (and, indeed, the diversity and richness of styles).

Some solutions of translations along the classical line of formal-dynamic equivalence either come closer to the original in terms of grammar and meaning or move away from the original in terms of form and micro-meaning, and thus the Bible translations (by following different translation strategies) cannot always be identical in terms of equivalence. The differences may be unambiguous not because of the diachronic

changes in languages over time but rather because of the translation solutions, since the question of equivalence between Bible translations depends not only on the translator or the translation but also on the reception of the community using it.

The first verse of the Philippians gives several examples of equivalence and of the functional approach to reach it. The relationship between ‘bishop’ – ‘deacon’ *ἐπίσκοπος* is obvious, and the meaning of ‘deacon/elder’ is clear from the context, but the connotative value and meaning of *idős gyülekezeti vezető* ‘elder church leader’ used by the EFO is not the same as a bishop or elder, but it may be easier to comprehend. In this example, it is important to note that the equivalence does not necessarily differ in the denotative, i.e. primary meaning, since the text used for the translations will be identical in content (the term *előljáró* ‘magistrate’ is used in the Catholic translations). Differences in equivalence may also occur in the more abstract meaning structure. The Hungarian translations of the saints living/residing in Philippi also show syntactic differences, which may facilitate interpretation on the one hand, while, on the other hand, they represent the veracity, the lushness of the language, the link to the Bible, to sacrality. Among the examples, the translation in EFO deserves attention, where the words of greeting appear in the verse, making the intention to be expressed in the text clear and explicit. Reading is facilitated by the use of synchronic language, and comprehension of the meaning is facilitated by the wording. A similar motivation is found in the wording *idős gyülekezeti vezetők* ‘elderly church leaders’, which is clearly explanatory and intended to facilitate the comprehension of the text.

Table 4. *Loss of connotative meaning*

	Phil 1:1
NKJV	Paul and Timothy, the servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.
ESV	Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:
RKG	Pál és Timótheus, Jézus Krisztus szolgái, minden szenteknek a Krisztus Jézusban, a kik Filippiben vannak, a püspökökkel és diakónusokkal egyetemben:

SZIT	Pál, és Timóteus, Krisztus Jézus szolgálói a Filippiben élő összes szentnek Krisztus Jézusban, az előjárókkal és a diakónusokkal együtt.
RÚF	Pál és Timóteus, Krisztus Jézus szolgálói mindazoknak a szenteknek Krisztus Jézusban, akik Filippiben vannak, püspökeikkel és diakónusaikkal együtt:
EFO	Üdvözet Páltól és Timóteustól, Krisztus Jézus szolgálótól, mindazoknak, akik Jézus Krisztus által Isten népéhez tartoznak Filippi városában, az idős gyülekezeti vezetőknék és diakónusoknak.

The shift towards functionalist approaches can therefore also be interpreted as a shift towards the reader: a move from the dominance of formal equivalence (Nida) to the foregrounding of the reader (Reiss). This path can be understood as the cornerstones or the alpha and omega of modern biblical translation. The diversity of reception and interpretation can be understood and applied to a larger text such as the Bible. In other words, the representational, expressive, and evocative functions of texts can have an impact on the semantic, syntactic, stylistic, or even textual-structural functions of the translated text.²⁴ This functionality (a step towards the reader) can be seen in the modern Hungarian translations, mainly in SZIT, RÚF, and EFO, where the interpretative function of the text is mostly applied. The verse should mean something like ‘true strength comes in times of trouble, not in times of peace’, which is explicitly translated in the above-mentioned translations.

Table 5. *Descriptive functions (“strength can be seen in adversity, not in peaceful times”)*

	Prov 24:10
NKJV	If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small.
ESV	If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

²⁴ Cf. HATIM, Basil (2009): *Translating Text in Context*. In: Munday, Jeremy (ed.): *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*. London, Routledge. 39–41.

RKG	Ha lágyan viseltesd magadat a nyomorúságnak idején: szűk a te erőd.
SZIT	Ha elhagyod magad, akkor az erőd gyöngeséggé válik a nélkülözés napján.
RÚF	A nyomorúság idején kiderül, hogy erős-e az, aki annak mondja magát.
EFO	Ha nehéz időkben gyengének bizonyulsz, akkor valóban kevés az erőd!

Functional approaches resulting in dynamic translations may be seen (according to the Lyland Ryken’s conception) as translations “destabilizing the original text”. The interpretation of the meaning which results in explicative translations promoting descriptive functions is clear in SZIT and EFO since the equivalents of the Greek lexemes (in the New Testament) *πατὴρ ἐσφράγισεν* (= the father marked with seal) are in SZIT and EFO rather interpretative translations, and the difference between the ÚF and RÚF can be interpreted as (re)translation back to the original text.

Since dynamic translation is intended to be easily interpretable, the translations often diverge lexically and grammatically from the original. (Although the functional approach and dynamic translation have a lot in common, I would not say functional methods are always equal to dynamic equivalence.) It is also problematic that translators do not always take into account the inspired or context-dependent biblical meaning of the individual words – they attribute inspiration only to larger passages or only to the Bible as a whole (e.g. in the case of hymns and psalms where the style itself makes the text inspired).

Table 6. *Descriptive functions (“the father marked with seal”)*

	John 6:27
NKJV	...which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.
ESV	...which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.

RKG	...Fia ád majd néktek; mert őt az Atya pecsételte el, az Isten.
SZIT	...Ezt az Emberfia adja nektek, aki mellett maga az Atya tett tanúságot .
RÚF	...amelyet az Emberfia ad majd nektek, mert őt pecsétjével igazolta az Atya Isten .
EFO	...Ezt a kenyeret majd az Emberfia adja nektek, mert ő az, akit Isten erre felhatalmazott .

5. Functionalism in a Nutshell

The basic conception of the functional approach is about to match the needs of the target reader group (as Nord writes, translation itself is a target-oriented process).²⁵ Translation and language use are determined by the language use and the needs of the target-language society. On the other hand, this approach is not a purely descriptive analysis, since by establishing the circumstances of the translation process, the norms of the different communicative situations can be defined and applied in a way that can be checked and measured at the end of the translation process (i.e. what and to what extent has been achieved). The Skopos theory, as the main translation theory focusing on functionalism, is centred on the purpose of the source text, and its translation strategies are subordinated to the purpose of the target-language text. The translation of a source-language text can be performed following several purposes: the most common ones can be the pragmatic-communicative context (situation as the target point), the text function (for example, aesthetic or evocative), or even the addressee (types of readers forming social groups).

One of these purposes or processes may be the relationship between the source language and the target language, or the social, cultural, or linguistic factors of the target audience. A similar tendency to the dynamic equivalence model is that the translator adjusts the target-language text to the interpretation of the target-language audience. A text

²⁵ NORD 2018, 1.

can be translated in several ways, always according to the current purposes: e.g. Genesis can be translated as a sacral text or purely for informational purposes – see *Table 1*.²⁶

The functional approach, and particularly the Skopos theory, has not escaped criticism. According to Christiane Nord,²⁷ one of the most common “criticisms” of the functional approach is the lack of the particular aims of the translator (*not all actions have an intention*), which is based on the premise that the translator’s decisions are not always driven by functionality to inform the reader, as – especially when translating literary texts – aesthetics may also drive the translator. This statement, however, can be interpreted in several ways, since the translation action always takes the reader into account, since it wants to address him or her – even through aesthetics.²⁸ There are similar doubts based on claims that during the translation process extensive sets of goals regarding the habits and knowledge of the target audience cannot be constantly applied (*not all translations have a purpose*). In many cases, the translator makes the text accessible and comprehensible to the target audience through a series of domestication strategies, producing a kind of cultural relativism (*functionalism is marked by cultural relativism*).²⁹ The basis of the translation process driven by the Skopos theory is the so-called translation brief, which is a descriptive description of the translation goals and principles to which the translator(s) adhere(s) during the translation process. This document may be changed during the translation, and even the content may be determined by the translation client. The translators translate as and when the translation brief states, and therefore do not follow their own decisions but fulfil the functions prescribed in the brief in order to be paid³⁰ (*functionalism produces mercenary experts*).

²⁶ Cf. REIß, Katharina – VERMEER, Hans J. (2013): *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action. Skopos Theory Explained*. London – New York, Routledge. 89–90.

²⁷ NORD 2018, 100–112.

²⁸ Cf. REISS – VERMEER 2013, 17–18.

²⁹ Cf. PYM, Anthony (1996): Material Text Transfer as a Key to the Purposes of Translation. In: Neubert, Albrecht – Shreve, Gregory – Gommlich, Klaus (eds.): *Basic Issues in Translation Studies. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference Kent Forum on Translation Studies II*. Kent, OH, Institute of Applied Linguistics, 337–346.

³⁰ Cf. PYM 1996.

One of the consequences of this process is that a translator using functionalist principles will depart from the source language text – given the temporal distance between the source- and target-language texts, this can be understandable (*functionalism does not respect the original*). In the process of translation, the target-language text is distanced from the source language, taking into account the interests, knowledge, and cultural embeddedness of the target audience, and therefore the text produced by functionalism is rather some sort of an adaptation of the source language than its true equivalent (functionalism, in fact, is a theory of adaptation). According to the principle of formal equivalence, for literary translators, functional translation is only useful for informative texts (e.g. newspaper articles, advertisements) where precise knowledge of the source-language text is not required, and substitution, adaptation, or paraphrasing is acceptable. On the other hand, in texts where language and wording are also of particular concern, target-language texts produced according to functionalist trends do not reflect the properties of the source-language text well, and should therefore not be used, for example, when translating the Bible (*functionalism does not work in literary translation*). In addition to the more specific problems of the translation process, there are also more general, theoretical problems. For example, in functionalist translation, the differences between source and target texts are seen as problematic, since in this case equivalence is actually expressed in two ways in the translation process: once in relation to the source text and once in relation to the communicative conditions of the target audience.³¹ The large degree of freedom applied in the translation process creates different levels of equivalence, from form- and content-sensitive translation (text reproduction) to equivalence-driven text production.³² Functionalist approaches are accused of transgressing the limits of translation proper by distancing target-language texts from source-language texts (*functional approaches transgress the limits of translation proper*). Opponents of functionalist approaches do not consider goal-oriented Skopos theory to be an original, specific translation approach because the process of translation has always had a goal – in fact, the process of translation cannot be imagined without translation goals, without some kind of principled decision to mandate the process of translation, without

³¹ KOLLER, Werner (1995): The Concept of Equivalence and the Object of Translation Studies. In: *Target*. 7, 2. 117.

³² Cf. REISS – VERMEER 2013, 103.

translator and reader.³³ This means that *Skopostheory is not an original theory* of translation. Perhaps the most serious charge in the field of scientific approaches is that functionalist theories are not empirically based but rather theoretically speculative in nature³⁴ (*functionalism is not based on empirical findings*).

6. Conclusions

It can be stated that the *translation purpose determines the choice of translation method and strategy* (which is in general the principle of functionality). To what extent the translated text will be easily acceptable by the target group is limited by translators' responsibility to their partners in the cooperative activity of translation (that is what Nord calls the principle of loyalty). As the needs of a community (may it be a language or a social one) constantly change, there will always be several translations (or even re-translations and revisions) of the same source text. In Bible translations, new conceptions in aims and functions bring the Word closer to the reader but move away from the source text (just as in the case of new Hungarian translations).

New ideas, objects, cultural and social characteristics urge translators to produce new translations, which will usually fulfil several needs of the target communities. These can only be linguistic norms (just as in the case of the “newest” Hungarian translation, the Károli 2021, in which syntactic changes brought the text published in 1908 closer to the reader of the new millennium while other, characteristic features of the text remained), or wider needs of a community (for example, simplified versions, where raising the popularity of the target text is the objective³⁵). It can be good if the needs of a social group are fulfilled; however, it can be bad if one wants to read a text very close to the source.

New translations are usually still welcome, but trends and control exist in the world of Hungarian translations. Translations of the Bible can be done although their acceptance will depend on the decisions of the church of the Bible society and their “distribution and dissemination” in the church and among the congregations.

³³ Cf. NEWMARK 1990, 106; REISS – VERMEER 2013, 105.

³⁴ Cf. PYM 1996, 338.

³⁵ See: DE JONG, Matthijs (2020): *Translating the Bible in Plain Language. The Story of the Dutch Bijbel in Gewone Taal*. Miami. *UBS Monograph Series*. 12. UBS.

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