CHAPTER SIXTEEN
CONCLUSION

The Introduction explained how this study had its genesis in an Indonesian theological faculty in the late 1970s, with students who were being encouraged to develop an indigenous theology, free from Western accretions. Frustration was experienced with the new Indonesian Bible in which certain of the 'cultural nodes' of the source text seemed to have been skewed in translation. I was made aware that the new version exemplified a significant new trend in Bible translation worldwide, inspired by the writings of Eugene A. Nida.

Accordingly the thesis set out to examine Nida's Dynamic Equivalence theory of translation and its impact on the Good News Bible and foreign language equivalents that were published by 1985, especially the new Indonesian translation.

SECTION 1

We saw how the study of linguistics has externalised many of the processes which translators have been employing intuitively for thousands of years. Previously translation theory had tended to centre on the two general issues of:
(i) the conflict between literal and idiomatic translation, and
(ii) the tension between the theoretical impossibility on the one hand and the fact of translation on the other.

Having rejected any thesis of radical untranslatability based on linguistic relativity, we proceeded to describe the situations in which loss of meaning most typically occurs. Special attention was given to problems arising from differences of culture, lexis and grammar. Most of the examples chosen reflect the Indonesian situation in which the writer served throughout the 1970s and which provided the original impetus for this study.

It is clear that the degree of difficulty in attaining translation equivalence is closely related to the amount of context available. Thus if we take two texts in different languages, one being a translation of the other, equivalence would be virtually impossible to achieve at the level of the morpheme. Even at the word level we can seldom hope that a particular word in the ST can always be translated by the same word in the TL. It is normally at the sentence level that there can be some realistic expectation of achieving equivalence. Thus while some loss of meaning in translation
is inevitable, the richer the context the less the loss. A written text such as the Bible has become decontextualised in the sense that we cannot expect helpful clues from the context of situation in the way we can with spoken messages. Nevertheless the structure and extent of the biblical corpus is such that the linguistic environment itself (or co-text) provides a vast amount of historical and cultural information necessary for a successful understanding and translation of its message.

If we were to single out the sociological factor that has had the deepest influence on the history of language, religion would no doubt qualify. Most languages have as their earliest written document a religious text. This is just as true of ancient Akkadian, Hittite and Sanskrit as it is for the countless tongues of tribal people in Africa, Latin America and Austronesia for whom Bible translations are being produced. We have seen that, unlike other faiths, Christianity has, from the start, been a translating religion so that most of Europe’s languages have as their first written document a translation of the Bible; a situation which is being repeated today in hundreds of tribal languages.

In Bible translation, as in translation of other literature, there are basically two quite different approaches. The first says that the finished product should read like an original creation in the TL. The other focuses on the meaning of the ST rather than on successful communication, forcing the reader back into the alien world of the author. Traditionally the second approach has prevailed in Bible translation, probably because the version functions as an authoritative replacement of the ST, unlike its counterparts in Judaism and Islam which are regarded merely as aids to understanding. However, we have drawn attention to a new world wide trend in Bible translation which is attributable to the influence of Eugene Nida’s Dynamic Equivalence theory.

Nida himself has confessed his debt to various different linguistic models. Accordingly, before examining DE theory we gave some brief consideration to four major linguistic ‘schools’ to which Nida himself pays tribute, viz Tagmemics, Stratificational grammar, Transformational-Generative grammar and Halliday’s Systemic grammar.

SECTION II

Until the 1980s the name of Eugene Nida dominated the literature on translation theory. Accordingly we turned to Nida’s writings seeking a more objective metalanguage for evaluating translations. More than that we looked for a

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comprehensive account of the translation process that does justice to the complexity of language structure and the problem of 'equivalence in difference'.

Nida has designated his approach as a Sociolinguistic theory of translation. In this way he differentiates his treatment not only from the Philological tradition in translation but also from the other Linguistic theories. Nida valued the more 'scientific' analysis of the Linguistic theorists but regards them as inadequate in so far as they treat the texts as objects in and of themselves, more or less unrelated to actual communication events. For him, translation is an act of communication and so the capacities, interests and presuppositions of the receptors primarily account for the success or failure of any translation, and therefore largely determine the formal features any satisfactory translation must possess.

Our own critique of Nida's DE theory takes account of most of his writings but is based primarily on the volume The Theory and Practice of Translation (1969) (or TAPOT), which is a manual for translators. This choice stems not only from the systematic presentation found in that book but also because Nida himself regards it as the best summary of his theory. The first two chapters of TAPOT expound the new concept of translation in broad terms. Subsequent chapters take up in systematic order the fundamental procedures that are being recommended; grammatical and semantic analysis, transfer, restructuring and testing.

Translation, for Nida, consists in reproducing in the receptor language (RL) the closest natural equivalent of the source language (SL) message. Bible translation is no different. The best translation, in his view, does not sound like a translation. Furthermore, the receptor-orientation of DE theory and the emphasis on successful communication is said to accord with the attitude of the Biblical writers themselves. An important assumption of DE Bible translation is that the NT writers expected to be understood. That is why they used the common language—Koine Greek. Therefore, unless an ambiguity in the text is linguistically marked, the translator should not ride the fence but opt for the most likely interpretation. In seeking natural equivalents, however, the translator must not distort the historical and cultural context of Scripture which is an integral part of its message. 'Jerusalem' cannot be replaced by 'Washington DC', 'demon possessed' cannot be translated 'mentally distressed'.

The central problem in the theory and practice of translation is to specify the nature and conditions of translation equivalence. Clearly what counts as equivalence will be influenced by one's theory of language, by purpose of the translation and by the model

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3 E.A. Nida Language Structure and Translation, (Stanford, Stanford University Press; 1975) 222
of linguistic description used in the translation process. Nida himself stresses the informational and the instrumental functions of language whereby it is a means of inducing a response in the hearer/reader. His translation model advocates evaluation on the basis of equivalent response on the part of the receptors. This is, we have suggested, an impossible goal. For a start we know nothing of the response of the original readers of the NT documents.

In describing his processes of Grammatical analysis, Nida rejects any approach to translation which applies its rules to 'surface structure' only. A grammatical surface structure may be ambiguous in that there are two or more possible underlying patterns of relations (cf. Chomsky's 'flying planes can be dangerous') and expressions which have similar grammatical form may involve quite different underlying semantic relations. Nida's utilisation of neo-Chomskian processes of analysis to probe beneath the surface structure of phrases and sentence, thereby making possible a genuine semantic equivalence, has much of value. Applied to the genitive construction in Greek for instance it has been particularly fruitful. However, Nida's analyses and explications are not without a subjective element, and one cannot help but be uneasy about an approach which claims to have discovered the four universal semantic categories. (viz object, event, relation, abstract) and the seven primitive English kernels.

Evaluation of Nida's semantics will be largely dependent on one's assessment of the value of componential analysis. Componential analysis assumes that each lexical unit is composed of a certain number of semantic components and that the words of a language can be grouped into semantic domains. The treatment in TAPOT is characteristically lucid and interesting, presenting a wealth of linguistic insights reflecting a life-long acquaintance with a variety of practical problems that confront a director of a Society for Bible translations. His componential analysis would seem to be a potentially useful tool for defining the differences between respective meanings. Nida rightly emphasises the importance of specifying context in semantic description, but his own treatment is marred by failure at this point. Even where the linguistic environment of the term under discussion is specified, he sometimes slides from the Hebrew and Greek texts to the English version on the assumption (undemonstrated) that the word in the English translation can be explained in terms of the underlying ST. In particular there is a failure to do justice to real verbal concordance in the ST, and what is arguably technical terminology is dissipated according to the nuance deemed to be uppermost in the various contexts. Those of more philosophical bent might well
question the 'cognitive reality' of semantic components. The usefulness of the metalanguage provided is doubtful too, if, as one suspects, the semantic components seem to be interpreted on the basis of the linguist's intuitive understanding of the lexical items which he uses to label them. Certainly, as we have sought to show, the examples of analysis presented in TAPOT are not free of subjectivity and it would not be surprising if this subjectivity is reflected in DE translation renderings.

The final chapters of TAPOT deal with Transfer, Restructure and Testing and contain a wealth of information and authoritative practical advice. One never doubts that this is the work of a master practitioner. And yet when one comes to passages expounding the theory of translation, one is left profoundly dissatisfied. The author's self-confessed eclecticism with regard to models of linguistic description results, not unexpectedly, in some lack of theoretical coherence. More seriously a 'docetic' view of language is reflected in claims that 'words may be regarded essentially as vehicles for carrying the components of meaning' or that transferring the message in translation 'is a bit like packing clothing into two difference pieces of luggage; the clothes remain the same, but the shape of the suitcases may vary greatly, and hence the way in which the clothes are packed must be different.' Such disparagement of the significance of the form of the original text leads to restructurings being recommended that are far more radical than the norms of the TL itself demands and that sometimes amount to a rewrite of the ST.

SECTION III

In Section III we sought to examine and evaluate the Good News Bible or Today's English Version, not only because of its phenomenal acceptance but also because it represents a conscious attempt to implement Nida's DE theory of translation, and as such has been commended by Nida himself. As we began to see in chapter 11, the GNB has had a significant influence on Bible translation in other languages, having been promoted as a model by the United Bible Societies. However, before beginning our study of the GNB a full chapter (chapter 9) was devoted to a brief history of English Bible translation, as no translation of the Scriptures can be undertaken or evaluated without due regard to its predecessors in the field—not least because such antecedents influence the attitudes of the receptors whose favourable response is so important in DE theory. This history we noted has revealed two dominant trends: the constant appearance of new translations on the one hand, and the continuing fascination of an archaic masterpiece in the King James Version (1611) on the other. The KJV has continued to be the measuring rod for aspiring rivals.

4 J. Lyons Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 477
Nida himself has commended the KJV, noting that it eschews literalism and in the 'Preface to the Reader' specifically advocates the very qualities that he seeks to promote: readability and accuracy. The problem is that these terms are not self-defining. The recent proliferation of new translations which abandon the formal register of solemn worship and recital in favour of the informal style of the mass media shows that a drastic change has occurred in the popular understanding of what a translation is meant to accomplish. The translators of the KJV showed considerable flexibility, especially in their usage of a variety of synonyms which contributed to its generally excellent literary style as over against the Revised Version (1881) that was supposed to replace it, but which was doomed to failure by its wooden literalism. Nevertheless, no one could ever claim that the KJV was a DE translation. It was not written in popular everyday English. Its style was already archaic, possibly deliberately so, at the time of publication. Just as the NT itself was written in a Jewish Greek style, so the English of the KJV reproduced not only Semitic idioms but also many Hebrew grammatical features. In particular, for our purposes, whatever flexibility the translators showed in rendering indifferent diction, they were careful to reproduce important verbal concordances from the ST. Thus the reader of the KJV (cf. RSV) constantly comes across technical (e.g. cultic) terminology used by the writers, reflecting their assumption that the significance of the message of Jesus could only be grasped from an awareness of the religious traditions and cultus of Israel.

The GNB has enjoyed extraordinary popular appeal. This is due firstly to its substantial intrinsic merits as a common language translation, and secondly to its excellent format, its section headings, outstanding illustrations, useful word list and index. Its main translator, Dr Robert Bratcher, has consciously sought to implement Nida's DE theory—a translation attempts not only to communicate the same meaning as did the original text, but also to evoke from its readers the same reaction aroused by the original text from its readers. DE proponents explain that every common language translation is a DE translation, though not vice versa. But it could be argued in response that the two are incompatible. If the wide variety of literary style and technical terminology of the original cannot be conveyed in the limited vocabulary of common English then there is no hope of achieving that equivalence of receptor response that Nida aims for.

While this point gains credence from the material presented in Section IV this thesis seeks to advance a more fundamental criticism. It is not merely that the GNB fails to exemplify DE principles perfectly but that the DE model itself is wrong-headed insofar as it reflects an inadequate theory of language and an inappropriate definition of equivalence.
Our own evaluation has suggested that the justly celebrated intelligibility of the GNB has not been without cost in terms of semantic loss. It is a simpler and more lucid translation that makes the Bible easier to understand, partly at the expense of there being less to understand. Difficult OT terminology that the NT writers utilised to express their understanding of the gospel of Jesus (e.g. the terminology of temple, sacrifice, exodus, redemption) tends to be dissipated in simplified paraphrases more intelligible to the modern receptor. But this kind of terminology provides vital signposts to the 'universe of discourse' or presuppositions of the NT writers and most of their original readers. The removal of this biblical 'salvation vocabulary' is one of the most crucial points at which the GNB and other DE translations part company with the tradition of English Bible translation hitherto.

Admittedly our own treatment has tended to be negative and to concentrate on the deficiencies of the translation. This is partly because its strong points (e.g. communicativeness) are obvious, but more particularly because of the need to moderate the exaggerated claims made for the GNB by Nida, not least because of its vigorous promotion as a model for Bible translation worldwide. The GNB is often more boldly interpretative than FC translations which seek to keep the ambivalence of the ST. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It depends on the purpose of the translation—something which is not decided on linguistic grounds. Thus decisions as to whether a translation is for scholarly, liturgical, missionary or private reading purposes fall outside the competence of the linguist. The GNB translators, in accordance with DE theory, have adopted a policy of choosing the most likely meaning where a word or construction in the ST may be open to several interpretations or nuances.

Such a policy may be particularly suitable for missionary purposes, or for private reading as an aid to Bible study. On the other hand, it might be regarded as an undesirable policy for a version that is to be used as a study Bible, or in liturgical reading, or as a basis for teaching. The linguist can only draw attention to the consequences of such decisions. We have argued that ambiguity that is generally avoided in scientific language, and tolerated in conventional language, is an essential ingredient in literary language systems and is a major device for evoking feeling. We have drawn attention to such expressions in the teaching of Jesus. Nida has failed to reckon with this feature of literary language and in removing all ambiguous expressions from translation gets rid of a significant device for eliciting the very reader response that looms large in his translation theory.
SECTION IV

In this section we looked more closely at some specific translation problems found in our examination of DE translations in Chapter 11 to see how adequately these are handled. In Chapter 12 we examined one of Nida's basic assumptions often quoted to justify the concentration on common language versions, namely that the NT writings were written in the Greek of the man in the street. That viewpoint, popular earlier this century as a result of Adolf Deissmann's comparative studies on Egyptian papyri, is seen to have been overstated. Subsequent research has examined the Semitic features of the language of the NT. To what extent this represents the influence of the LXX, or the Hebrew-Aramaic mother tongue of the writers, or is a special dialect of Jewish Greek, cannot yet be determined with certainty. The point is we cannot assume that this Hebraized Greek style was 'natural' even for the writers of the NT, let alone for the original receptors, many of whom were Gentiles.

The second problem, dealt with in Chapter 13, was the handling of 'verbal concordance' in the ST. The study focused on a particular group of cultic words, the ἱλαστικος (propitiation/atonement) terms which have a long history of usage in the Greek Bible or Septuagint. This detailed word study sought to avoid the pitfalls pointed out by James Barr by giving full value to context and synchronic description. The ST was seen to confront the translator with a concatenation of ideas which, however foreign or repugnant to the modern mind, are vital to that text's interpretation—sacrifice, blood, propitiation. DE translations, such as the GNB that drop such cultic terminology in favour of a general paraphrase more intelligible to the modern reader, obliterate the concordance in the ST and deprive him of access to the 'universe of discourse' of the NT writers.

The point of these two chapters was not to denigrate translations which aim at good, intelligible English. Naturalness is highly desirable but it must not be absolutised. One cannot escape the fact that the Bible contains many concepts and expressions which are difficult for the modern reader. There is no evidence that they were much less so for the original readers. They, too, had to cope with technical terminology, with thousands of OT allusions and with Hebrew loan words, idioms and translation that must have been very strange to many of them.

Nida draws on communication theory to underline the concept of the 'channel capacity' of receptors, and says that this must not be overloaded. His warning is salutary, especially where the translators are Biblical scholars whose own familiarity with the ST often blinds them to the problems encountered by ordinary readers when confronted by translations of literal tendency. But channel capacity must not be thought of as
something rigid and inflexible, but rather as something elastic that can be stretched and broadened. The history of the English Bible is a powerful illustration of this very point. The KJV expanded the language of the English speakers such that foreign concepts and expression entered the everyday speech of people who were often illiterate.

Thirdly in Chapter 14 we focused on the need to preserve the cultural and historical distance of the text being translated. Every text reflects elements peculiar to its own natural environment, institutions and culture. Some loss of meaning is inevitable in the process of substitution or replacement in the RL. The problem looms far larger in the translation of an ancient text such as the Bible than it does with material such as mathematical studies or scientific experiments where there are practically no specific local features. Much depends too, on the purpose of the translation, but Nida himself warned against 'cultural transposition' in the translation of the Bible. His own writings have provided some useful guidelines on how to handle cultural adaptation. However, we have noted a potential problem in DE theory where the terminology or categories of Scripture are repugnant to modern readers (e.g., in English versions, sexist language, and jealousy or propitiation ascribed to God; in Indonesian versions, references to Israel). According to the DE model, the translation is a failure if it does not evoke a response similar to that assumed for the original readers. But the situations and presuppositions of the original receptors were so different from those of today's readers that equivalent impact cannot be hoped for unless the strange historical context of the ST is replaced by something more meaningful to the modern reader. At this point the notion of translation has merged into that of communication, and its utility, especially for translating an ancient sacred text such as the Bible, is doubtful. 5

Whereas the handling of inclusive language is generally judicious we have observed that DE translations badly skew the message of the ST in handling the terminology referring to Israel and the Jewish context of the documents. In a number of places this terminology is replaced by general references to 'the people of God' or 'the chosen people' presumably so that the modern reader senses the application to himself. In other places the constant insertion of 'Jewish' (e.g. before 'priest', 'law', 'temple') changes the atmosphere of the message to such an extent that one feels that what is being described was as alien to the original writer and his readers as it is to the modern Gentile receptor. This insensitivity to important 'cultural nodes' of the ST is the kind of weakness one would expect to find in a translation based on the DE model. A preliminary examination of DE counterparts of the GNB, in Indonesian, Malay, Chinese, French, Javanese and Dutch suggests that only the Dutch version avoids this

mishandling of such significant cultural material. New DE translations for regional languages in Indonesia are reducing the many references to Israel because of the unfavourable connotations in an Islamic context. This again illustrates the irreconcilable claims of semantic content and receptor response.

Finally in Chapter 15 we turned to the handling of implicit information in the ST and the translation of metaphor. The treatment in the UBS and SIL Manuals was found to be defective. This was not surprisingly reflected in the GNB and its foreign language DE counterparts.

Although the GNB is a translation for those who speak English, its influence is evidenced not only in other recent European translations but also in at least three important recent non-Western versions (viz. Malay, Indonesian, Chinese). In fact, GNB renderings are regularly reproduced to such an extent that it seems to have been the Source Text rather than the Greek (or Hebrew in the case of the Indonesian OT) despite the claim in the Prefaces that the translators worked from the original languages. However excellent the motivation of those who have laboured to produce these new DE translations, the result is that the receptors must approach Scripture through a Western grid.

The inevitability of a Western grid is guaranteed by the commitment to explicitness in modern Bible translation. The translator avoids ambiguity and selects the meaning he regards as most likely, closing all other interpretative options.

In the past translators have only made explicit the information that the RL required. Now as a result of Nida’s influence over the last 40 years manuals used by UBS and SIL translators open a Pandora’s box by recommending explicitation whenever ‘the principle of full accurate communication of the meaning of the original message demands it’.

In particular the commitment to explicitness means that the metaphor and the motifs of the Bible had to be reprocessed and replaced by the explicit, analytical language with which Westerners feel more comfortable. Yet ambiguity, arresting imagery, and the evocation of multiple associations pervade the Bible. Jesus himself often used such language to shock or puzzle the hearer, to force him to introspect, or to look at things in a completely new way. The substitution of paraphrase for metaphor always involves loss of meaning. Paraphrase is talk within a single domain whereas metaphor links two domains in potentially elaborate parallelisms of infinite depth. In fact, it is

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6 Conversation with Dr Daniel Arichea, UBS Translation Consultant 22 January 1981.
 ironic that the DE emphasis on explicitness, in practice consistently militates against that which is so crucial in Nida's theory—receptor response.

In summary, then, the translator needs more than a science of analysis. Our culture, dominated as it is by technical and the analytical, is profoundly unpoetic. The translator of literature such as the Bible needs sensitivity to the power of words and style and particularly to the use of imagery that expands the horizon, and, in the case of some of the terminology we have drawn attention to, establishes a mental and emotional network rather than a one-to-one connection. Translation involves art as well as science.

Translation is an operation involving languages. This being the case, any theory of translation must draw on a theory of language. DE theory cannot provide the comprehensive account of the translation process that we seek, firstly because Nida's 'vehicular concept' of meaning does not do justice to the complexity of language and to the significance of form. Thus Henri Meschonnic 'was critical of Nida's willingness to dissociate style from meaning "...meaning and form: there are not two dissociable, heterogeneous entities. A text is a whole entity, to be translated as a whole."'7 Secondly, his translation model defines equivalence in terms of the response of the receptors. Though any evaluation of a Bible translation must take into account its purpose and the intended audience, the receptor in DE theory is granted such a determinative role that the concept of translation can no longer be distinguished from the more general notion of communication. Even if one were able to measure the reaction of the original readers of the NT documents, one could not hope to stimulate the same response in the modern reader since the presuppositional background is so completely different.

There is no linguistic consensus on the definition of translational equivalence. In fact after over twenty years of debate, the concept of equivalence is being increasingly abandoned. It suggests an illusion of symmetry between languages that does not exist and is said to distort the basic problems of translation.8 It can be inferred from the above criticisms of recent Bible versions, that our own definition would have a semantic, rather than a receptor response focus. A translation of the Bible, in principle, should aim to retain, as far as possible, the exegetical potential of the ST. This would mean in practice that a good translation of the NT will preserve a sense of historical and cultural distance. It will take the modern reader back into the alien milieu

of first century Judaism where the Christian movement began. It will show him how the gospel of Jesus appeared to a Jew, and not how that Jew would have thought had he been British or American.

Post Script for Postconstructionists

Has the investigation achieved anything more than reinforce the writer’s prejudice? Clearly my original doubts about the adequacy of Nida’s DE approach, for Bible translation at least, have been substantiated. Furthermore, linguistic reasons for that dissatisfaction can now be articulated and supporting evidence adduced.

However, in one important point the results of the research have been totally different from my original premise. I had anticipated that Nida’s emphasis on naturalness, communication and receptor response would lead to cultural adaptation and a domestication of the Bible in each target language. Clear indications of this tendency in the GNB have been noted. But astonishingly there was almost no evidence of such domestication in the Indonesian versions or the other recent non-European versions looked at. In fact, the renderings of the more traditional, FC Indonesian versions were regularly more culturally appropriate.

What emerged was the immense influence of the GNB on three important non-Western versions, the Indonesian and (to the extent they were consulted) the Malay and Chinese versions. GNB renderings were found to be regularly reproduced to such an extent that it seems to have been not just a model, but the actual base for translation, rather than the ST. This is despite the claim in the Prefaces that the translators worked from the original languages. The result is that the receptors must approach Scripture through a Western grid.

To what extent the imposition of a Western grid is guaranteed by Nida’s emphasis on avoiding ambiguity and adopting explicitness could be a subject for further investigation.

Basil Hatim has recently criticized the Anglo-American translation tradition of the past century with its emphasis on fluency and transparency and its aim of making the original text invisible to the reader. He claimed that English translators of modern Arabic literature, under pressure from publishers, often impose structure or introduce explicit logical connectives (e.g. ‘however’, ‘so’) that are assumed in his own Arabic language. In Arabic the burden of meaning is on shared experience whereas in English it rests on the visual text where ‘the logic all hangs out’. Arabic literariness resides in the chaos of the text! Textual patterns that are integral to Arabic (e.g. repetition, lexical
couplets) are often dispensed with by English translators even though they are essential to the meaning.⁹

The whole issue of subjectivity and ideology in translation has attracted the attention of poststructuralist linguists. Thus Lawrence Venuti has described the grossly unequal exchanges between the hegemonic English language nations, particularly the United States, and others in Europe, Africa, Africa, Asia and the Americas. He claims that Anglo-American publishing has been instrumental in producing readers who are aggressively monolingual and culturally parochial, while reaping the economic benefits of successfully imposing Anglo-American cultural values on a sizeable foreign readership—'if one is intelligible within the outlook of American ideology, then one has a chance of being translated' he says, quoting an Italian Foreign Affairs official.¹⁰

The analogy with Bible translation is not a comfortable one but it raises the question as to whether the promotion of Dynamic Equivalence translation procedures has become an unwilling instrument of this western cultural hegemony.

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