

BIBLE TRANSLATION AND RELEVANCE THEORY

Ferdinand Deist
University of Stellenbosch

Bible translation commenced with the oral interpretations and translations of the fifth century BC (Neh. 8:5-9) and is still in progress. Over the centuries various translation techniques were employed (see, for instance, De Waard 1990),¹ but since about 1960 Bible translations done by the *United Bible Societies* and its affiliates have been based on the code model of communication (see Nida 1964; Schneider 1990:2-8).² Wilss's text book (Wilss 1982) suggests that the situation in general translation theory is not very different.

It was precisely this model of communication theory that was challenged by Sperber and Wilson's *relevance theory* (Sperber & Wilson 1986; see also Wilson & Sperber 1987).

Set within this context this paper seeks to achieve two goals:

- (a) to illustrate the contribution the pragmatic approach of relevance theory can make towards Bible translation, and
- (b) to indicate a few shortcomings which relevance theory reveals when applied to the interpretation of an ancient religious text, namely the Old Testament.³

1. THE POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF RELEVANCE THEORY TO BIBLE TRANSLATION

"Communication," so Wilson & Sperber (1987:8) assert, "is achieved not by coding and decoding messages, but by providing evidence for an intended hypothesis about the communicator's intentions." If accepted - and Sperber and Wilson produce convincing arguments in its favour - this approach could, with apologies to Hirsch,⁴ be called a theory "in defence of the author".

Contrary to earlier times, Biblical interpretation has since the sixties insisted with Wellek & Warren (1964:42),

The whole idea that the "intention" of the author is the proper subject of literary history seems ... quite mistaken. The meaning of a work of art is not exhausted by, or even equivalent to, its intention... The total meaning of a work of art cannot be defined merely in terms of its meaning for the author and his contemporaries.

Following this line of argument Biblical scholars and translators⁵ left historical interpretation behind and turned to "immanent" methods of exegesis such as discourse analysis,⁶ structural analysis,

structuralism, literary criticism and deconstruction (which may even involve reading a text *against* its intention - Tolbert 1989). As Hirsch (1964:3) puts it:

... once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation. By an inner necessity the study of "what the text says" became the study of what it says to an individual critic... The word ["reading"] seemed to imply that if the author had been banished, the critic still remained, and his new, original, urbane, ingenious, or relevant "reading" carried its own interest.

By defining "meaning" from the viewpoint of the rational *speaker*, relevance theory

- * convincingly questions the adequacy of mere grammatico-semantic textual analysis for textual interpretation,
- * proposes a series of pragmatic criteria which enable interpreters to have confidence in their hypotheses on what the speaker's intention might have been, and by the same token,⁷ and
- * enables interpreters to decide on the basis of a whole range of well-defined criteria the adequacy or otherwise of a particular interpretation.

On this basis we can once again begin to evaluate the accuracy of Bible translations. In what follows I shall discuss a few randomly chosen problematic utterances in the Hebrew Bible⁸ to illustrate the value of applying Sperber and Wilson's criteria to biblical interpretation.

1.1 Recovering the explicit content of utterances

Recovering the specific intended meaning of an utterance first of all requires the retrieval of its *explicit content*, which involves

- (a) disambiguation of ambiguous constituents,
- (b) assigning referents to terms and
- (c) the enrichment of vague forms or terms (Sperber & Wilson 1986:72).

In each of these instances one has to determine the *most readily accessible content that a rational speaker would have deemed relevant enough to have effect on the cognitive world of the hearer(s) in that particular situation*.

1.1.1 Disambiguation in Genesis 1:1

Genesis 1:1 reads:⁹

- (1) *brshth br' 'lhm 't hshnym w't h'rq*
most frequently translated with the proposition
- (2) *In the beginning God created heaven and earth*
which provides the reader of the translation with an already disambiguated utterance which the utterance itself is not,¹⁰ for one can also translate it with
- (3) *In the beginning of God's creating heaven an earth (the earth was waste and void, with darkness hovering over the deep),*
thereby
- (a) marking the utterance as a circumstantial clause and
- (b) implying that the water mass had already been in existence when God started to create.
- If one translates
- (4) *In the beginning God created heaven and earth (as a result of which the earth became a waste and void mass of water covered in darkness)*
one
- (a) takes the utterance for a well-formed proposition, and
- (b) implies that the mass of water was the result of God's first act of creation.

Asking Sperber and Wilson's simple question: "What would have been the most readily accessible content the rational writer would have deemed relevant for his particular audience?" shifts the problem from a merely semantic (and dogmatic) level to the level of historical argument and forces us to ask: Who was the author? Who was the audience? What did their cognitive worlds look like? What would, from the viewpoint of the speaker, have been relevant¹¹ for the audience? Answering such questions has two advantages.

- (a) Given the huge historical and geographical distance between them, the original author and the presentday reader no longer share circumstances or long and short term memories. Consequently the presentday reader (relatively acquainted with the text) often short-circuits the process by simply substituting his/her own memory or rationality for that of the author.¹² By forcing the reader to reconstruct the rational world of the *speaker*, this kind short-circuiting is forestalled.

- (b) Even though the information necessary for reconstructing the author's cognitive world has to be gathered from *outside* the text and rests upon historical reconstruction, which in its turn rests upon certain premisses and theories, precisely the process of gathering and arguing about that information brings the process of interpretation on the level of sound (historical) argumentation about the most probable interpretation.

There is, however, a problem with this utterance in Genesis 1:1 that may question the general applicability of the principle of disambiguation. The ambiguity of this utterance lies in the (pre-pronounced) *consonantal* text, that is, one could *normalise* this text in either of two ways, thus producing the sentences (3) or (4). In vocalising this consonantal text, the medieval Massoretes, rather than choosing between the two possibilities, merged them to form an *ungrammatical* sentence suggesting *both* readings.¹³ This means that they *intentionally* created the ambiguity, so that the question arises whether rational speakers *always* intend to communicate a unique, non-ambiguous proposition. To the Massoretes, so it seems, "relevance" meant allowing their audience to interpret the utterance in either of two ways. Had they not allowed the audience this freedom, they might have lost the attention of that section of the audience that subscribed to the alternative view of creation. It would thus seem that, where people's cognitive worlds are inter alia constituted by problematic dogmatic preferences, authorial ambiguity might be intentional. If this deduction is valid, one perhaps has to distinguish between various *sorts* of texts before applying the principle of disambiguation indiscriminately.

1.1.2 Assigning referents in Genesis 1:2

The second utterance in Genesis 1:2 reads

- (5) *w^erû^ach ʿ^elohîm m^erachephet ʾal-p^eney ʿ^ehôm,*

translated in the *Kings James Version* with

- (6) *and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*

In this translation the expression *rû^ach ʿ^elohîm* is assigned the referent "Spirit of God", that is, the Holy Spirit. However, the *New English Bible* translates:

- (7) *and a mighty wind ... swept over the surface of the waters,*

while the *New World translation* reads

- (8) *God's active force was moving to and fro over the surface of the waters.*

From the point of view of semantic representation (6), (7) and (8) are all possible translations. To recover the explicit meaning of the utterance Sperber and Wilson suggest that pertinent referents be

assigned to (nominal) constituents, in this case *ruach*. The referent assigned to this term will determine whether *'elohim* should be interpreted as another noun or as an adjective.¹⁴ If one assigns to *ruach* the referent "wind", *'elohim* should be interpreted as an adjective. If one assigns to *ruach* the referent "spirit" or "active force" it forms a genitive clause with *'elohim* as the governing noun (i.e. *'elohim's ruach*).

To choose a relevant referent, we have to leave the field of linguistics and turn to pragmatics. In terms of relevance theory one has to choose the most readily accessible referent which the rational speaker would have thought to exercise a contextual effect in the cognitive world of his particular audience. So, once again, we shall have to reconstruct the historical circumstances in which the text had originated. In *that* environment (of about 650 BC), the concept of "Holy Spirit" (fitted into the dogma of the Trinity) did not exist. Had the speaker intended "Holy Spirit" as the referent of the expression *ruach 'elohim*, his audience would have had no way of recovering that referent. One could therefore disregard the King James Version's interpretation of *ruach 'elohim* ("Holy Spirit") as being irrelevant, and therefore wrong.

To take a short cut here,¹⁵ the translation with "mighty wind" fits much better into the cultural environment and popular concept of creation of the time, so that "mighty wind" would have affirmed the audience's cognitive world. This translation even makes better sense in its literary context, so that the referent "mighty wind" might very well have been the first most readily accessible referent the speaker would have intended his audience to assign to the expression *ruach 'elohim* and would have enabled the hearer to assign a more relevant overall meaning to the utterance.

Once again Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory enables the Bible translator to conduct a verifying argument about the intended meaning of an utterance. There are, however three major problems with "assigning referents" to some biblical proper nouns that deserve mentioning.

Firstly, there is the problem of our ignorance. There are quite a number of so-called *hapax legomena*, that is, terms occurring only once in the entire literary corpus of, for instance, the Old Testament, so that it is very difficult to ascertain their referents.¹⁶ There are also quite a number of references to flora and fauna the exact referents of which are unknown (see Zohary 1982). Sometimes we have to embark on extensive research projects to assign a specific referent to a term which the speaker accepted his hearers to have been able to recover effortlessly (see Na'aman 1990; Hayes & Kuan 1991).¹⁷

Secondly there is the problem that, even though we may be able to assign a specific referent to a term, that referent does not reveal the socially implied meaning of that term. For instance, to know that a certain Hebrew term refers to the gesture of "kissing", does not reveal the complete referent of that gesture (see Ellington 1990).

Thirdly, there is the problem of the literary character of Old Testament literature.¹⁸ Not only does this literature confront the reader with all sorts of, for instance, unidentifiable mythical monsters (see Uehlinger 1990), but also with the problem of determining the relevant interplay between the real referent of a proper noun and the literary character by the same name - a distinction not drawn by relevance theory.¹⁹ For example, while it is possible to reconstruct the "real" referent in some instances (e.g. the "real" Baal or Ahab in distinction to the literary Baal and Ahab characters of Deuteronomistic literature)²⁰ it is quite impossible in other cases (we only have knowledge of, for instance, the *literary* Saul, David and Daniel).²¹ While these literary characters could provide one with some insight into the cognitive world of the *authors*, it is very difficult - and sometimes outrightly impossible - to know the relationship between that world and the cognitive world of the respective audiences, a relationship that is vital for the application of relevance theory.

1.1.3 *Enriching the meaning of vague terms and expressions in Proverbs 1:7*

Proverbs 1:7 reads:

(9) *yir'at YHWH re'shit da'at*

The expression *re'shit da'at* is relatively clear and means "the foundation/principle of knowledge". But what is this "foundation" or "principle"? The expression *yir'at YHWH* provides the answer to this question. Apart from the fact that the genitive relationship between *yir'ah* and *YHWH* is vague, the meaning of the term *yir'ah* is underdefined as well. The expression is variously translated as:

(10) *the fear of the LORD (New English Bible; Old Afrikaans translation, Revidierter Lutherbibel),*

(11) *service to the Lord (New Afrikaans Bible),*

(12) *reverence for the LORD (Good News),*

In terms of relevance theory (10), (11) and (12) consider the most readily accessible meaning of *yir'ah* which the rational speaker would deem contextually effective and that would best contribute to the overall meaning of the utterance is "fear", "reverence/respect", or "service". But according to relevance theory only *one* of these meanings can be considered the contextually "unique" meaning of the term. Recovering the relevant context that would adequately enrich the meaning of this term involves the reconstruction of the cognitive world of exilic wisdom instructors. Within that context *one* meaning of *yir'ah* does present itself as the intended meaning, namely "reverence/respect", thereby ruling out the translation with "service". Also in this instance relevance theory can assist Bible translators to select the more appropriate meaning from among a set of possible meanings.

1.2 Recovering the implicit content

1.2.1 Recovering implicatures in Psalm 137:9

Psalm 137:9 reads:

(13) 'ashrey sheyo'chez w^enippeç 'et 'olalayik 'el hassala'

(14) *Happy is he who shall grab and dash your sucklings against the rock*

Judged by existing Bible translations this utterance provides us with the proposition:

(15) *The poet wishes that babies' heads will be smashed against a rock*

However, looking for the *contextually* most relevant and readily accessible implied premisses and conclusions of the utterance, one comes across the concept of *justice* expressed in the ancient principle of *ius talionis* ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"). Taking this implied premiss as part of the author's cognitive world, one may argue that the most readily accessible implied meaning of this utterance is *not* that the poet asks for the physical murder on Babylonian babies, but that the implied proposition is something like:

(16) *Happy is the person who will restore justice in this situation*

Once again the criteria proposed by relevance theory for assigning specific meanings to utterances underlines the necessity for Bible translators to be thoroughly informed, not only about Hebrew grammar and semantics, but especially about the *world* in which the source texts originated.

1.2.2 Recovering stylistic effects in Judges 11:38

Very often Bible translators simply ignore the stylistic features of Hebrew utterances as if they merely served the purpose of ornamentation (see, however, Schneider 1990:55-58). According to Sperber and Wilson the extra processing effort required by a "stylised" utterance not only serves as an ostensive communicative stimulus drawing a hearer's attention to a particular bit of information but also as a guarantee of the speaker to the hearer that the stylistically encoded information is adequately relevant to justify the effort required to recover that information.

This principle can be illustrated by interpreting an utterance in Judges 11:38 (Waltke & O'Connor 1990:294) which reads:

(17) *wattelek hi' w^ere'òtêha*

(18) *so she and her friends went*

In this phrase a singular verb form ("she went") is used as the predicate of a plural subject ("she and her friends"). Normally one would have expected a plural form of the verb to accompany a plural subject. The fact that the author used a singular form serves as an ostensive stimulus to indicate that he intended to convey *extra* information. In this case he shifts the focus of his story from the group of people, namely Jephthah's daughter and her friends, to the daughter and lets the hearer see the scene through her eyes only. Examples of this nature can be multiplied at will.

Sperber and Wilson (1986:218) correctly observe, "There is no entirely neutral style", but - and this I find a shortcoming in their theory - they do not pay special attention to the *ideological* nature of style. Kress & Hodge (1981) have demonstrated that syntactical transformations such as passivisation, topicalisation and deletion may be ideologically functional transformations. It would, therefore, be important to include in relevance theory a stage for the recovering of the ideological import of syntactical/stylistic features of utterances.²²

1.2.3 Recovering metaphorical meaning in Ruth 3:7-8

According to relevance theory a hearer listening to an utterance will first attempt recovering the literal interpretation of an utterance, since that would be the most readily accessible interpretation. If the literal interpretation proves inconsistent with the criterion of relevance the hearer will put in more effort to recover the first accessible meaning that is contextually relevant.

In the Ruth narrative she goes to the threshing floor where Boaz had had somewhat more wine to drink than was necessary to counter the dehydrating effect of a day's labour on the fields. This resulted in him falling asleep very quickly. Then Ruth approached

(19) *ballat war^egal marg^elōtaw wattishkab*

(20) *quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down (The New International Version)*²³ Later that night Boaz suddenly woke up *wayyilapet* ("and twisted"), *w^ehinney* ("and indeed!") there was a woman lying *marg^elōtaw* ("[at] his feet"). The old *Afrikaans Translation* translated "feet" by "voetenent", a meaning of the term *r^egalōt* also implied by most translations. But how could this man by *twisting* have seen the woman lying by his feet? Clearly the text invites the reader to put in some extra effort to determine the location of the woman. This extra effort leads to the discovery that "feet" should not be taken literally, but *metaphorically* (some would say *euphemistically*) for the man's sexual organs.²⁴ This interpretation of the episode also explains the advice Ruth's mother-in-law gives her: "Now, you just sit still, my daughter, until you have seen what comes of it (*haddabar*), for the man will not remain undisturbed, but will attend to the matter (*haddabar*) immediately (*hayyom*)" (3:18). It also explains the urgency with which Boaz later seeks to "redeem" the woman. The metaphorical reading thus

contributes towards a more relevant overall interpretation of the text as utterance, and is therefore, in terms of relevance theory, more adequate than other interpretations of the passage. This argument assists us in assessing the translation found in *Die Lewende Bybel* better translation than that found in other translations. The *Lewende Bybel* translates: "Somewhat later Ruth approached [him] and quietly lifted the blanket on one side and lay down. As Boaz woke in the middle of the night and turned around, he saw a woman lying next to him."

Even though this example illustrates the usefulness of applying relevance theory to Bible translation, it is an open question whether relevance theory's proposed definition of metaphor is sufficient for detecting *all* metaphors. For instance, had Sperber and Wilson paid specific attention to a syntactical-semantic definition of metaphor, their theory could have been enriched considerably. Metaphors are sometimes syntactically "marked" by syntactic incongruence. Consider, for example, the syntactically incongruent construction

(21) *Yahweh is a rock*

in which the noun phrase [Yahweh] contains the semantic feature [+ alive], but is combined with a predicate noun phrase containing the semantic feature [- alive], which would normally produce an ungrammatical sentence. In this case the mere *syntax* already features as an ostensive stimulus signalling "possible metaphor".²⁵

1.2.4 Recovering irony in Psalm 137:²⁶

"Metaphor," Sperber and Wilson (1986:243) tell us, "plays on the relationship between the propositional form of an utterance and the speaker's thought; irony plays on the relationship between the speaker's thought and the thought of someone other than the speaker." Irony occurs when a speaker "echoes" another person's thoughts or premisses in a context which negates the truth claim inherent in the propositional form of those thoughts or premisses. Recognizing irony thus implies knowledge of the source of which the particular utterance is an echoe (Sperber & Wilson 1986:240).

Applied to Psalm 137:3 these criteria identify the request by the Babylonian guards to the captives as ironical.

(22) *Sing us a Zion song!*

they said. Since Zion songs (e.g. Ps 46, 48) were songs of joy and triumph and no Zion song would fit the context of dehumiliation in which the captives found themselves, the request to recite a Zion song could be nothing but ironical.

There is, however, a problem with this interpretation. On the request of the guards the captives respond,

(23) *How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? (Ps 137:4 - NIV.)*

By rebutting the guards' request the listeners *in the text* do not take the guards' request ironically, but *literally*. What is now the more reliable criterion: the reconstructed *historical* situation or the *literary* context? Does the mental distress of the captives prevent them from recognising the irony in the guards' request, or is a pragmatic interpretation of this poem out of place? Relevance theory does not address the problem of the difference between the world *created in the text* and the world *outside the text*. Perhaps more clarity in this regard would enhance the applicability of the theory in the field of translating literary/religious texts.²⁷

2. RELEVANCE THEORY AND THE TRANSLATION OF LITERARY/RELIGIOUS TEXTS

The role assigned by relevance theory to the hearer in the interpretation of utterances coincides to a large extent with the role of the *implied reader* in general literary theory, and may even provide a more specific and structured content to this theoretical concept. There are, however, from a literary point of view, two major problems with the application of relevance theory to the interpretation of literary, and more specifically religious, texts. The first concerns the ideal speaker and the second the "disinterested" hearer seemingly presupposed by this theory.

2.1 The problem of the ideal speaker

Relevance theory concerns itself mainly with

- (a) the interpretation of isolated utterances "sent" between
- (b) individuals of fairly equal social status, and not with
- (1) the interpretation of (literary/religious) *texts*
- (2) and communication between unequal partners, or with
- (3) intercultural communication.

It takes its point of departure within the framework of the workings of "the" human mind and operates with a concept of universal rationality. This reduction of human minds to "the" human mind and of all forms of rationality to a particular *logical* view of rationality may perhaps have created a lack in the theory on which I would like to comment briefly.

Firstly, the cultural position of the rational speaker vis-à-vis the hearer has a major influence on the way in which information is processed and on the question whether any new/relevant information is processed at all (see Schneider 1990:42f.). If an ancient Hebrew citizen says to his king, "What is your servant, the dog, that he should do such a thing?" (2 Kings 8:13) the substitution of the third person for the first as well as the reference to being a dog constitutes mere court style *without any new information being transferred from the citizen to the king*. O'Neill (1988/9:243) is correct: "A purely cognitivist view of communication of the kind provided by Sperber and Wilson cannot ... be sustained: communicative acts are social acts that have an irreducible social dimension." Some forms of communication, O'Neill points out, are intended to maintain or strengthen social relations, to exercise power, etc., so that the insistence that communication always implies the transference of (cognitive) propositional information may be an overstatement.²⁸

Secondly, the way information is processed is not only determined by what the rational speaker may regard as relevant for the hearer, but also by what the hearer expects to hear. If, in a particular situation, a speaker would process information in a way that would transgress accepted taboos, the communication process may fail even if the intended message might be of prime relevance to the hearer.²⁹ This fact has certain important implications for vagueness, style, metaphor, and irony. Relevance theory should, in my opinion, extend pragmatics to explicitly include the socially defined relationships between speaker and hearer.

Thirdly, since religious groups tend to be exclusive, religious texts are potentially ideologically biased. That is, the cognitive world of the speaker reflected in his (religious) text may present the reader with a very distorted picture of reality.³⁰ For example, the prophets of the Old Testament provide their readers with a picture of their time that was not shared by, for example, contemporary priests and rulers, and might - viewed from the angle of the audience - be a grotesquely distorted picture of reality. From the point of view of their contemporary audiences most of the prophets' words should - in terms of relevance theory - therefore be interpreted as ironical rather than as referential. Unless one is thoroughly informed about the ideological differences between various groups at the time of writing one will be tempted to reconstruct the propositional content of the prophets' utterances as referential in intent and miss the point. To get at the real proposition implied by a prophetic utterance thus requires much more processing effort than the interpretation of a more "profane" text. And this might be true of religious texts in general, so that the criterion of "the least effort" might be somewhat dangerous in the case of religious and other highly ideological or polemic texts.

Fourthly, if one bases one's interpretation so squarely on the *rationality* of the speaker as does relevance theory, one has to make room for the insight that rationality itself is not a neutral term, as O'Neill (1988/9) pointed out quite clearly. Apart from O'Neill's (1988/9:247ff) point about practical rationality, it is also true that, *what seems perfectly rational from one perspective might seem totally*

- (c) the proposed definition of metaphor, which seems to be insufficient for detecting and interpreting all metaphors.
- (d) the distinction between the world created in the text and the world outside the text, since this may have an influence on the notion of "most readily accessible interpretation" as well as the notion of "relevance".
- (e) the problem of the somewhat too idealistically conceived speaker and hearer, for whom much more might be at stake in the process of communication than the mere exchange of neutral information, so that some form of ideology criticism seems to be called for to complement relevance theory.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a survey of early translations and translation techniques, see Deist (1988).
2. See the *Translator's handbooks* published by the United Bible Societies, e.g. Smalley & De Waard 1979; Clark & Hatton 1989.
3. Sinclair & Winckler (1991:88-89) refer to the problematic nature of the testing of theories. Following the nearly ancient notion of Herschel (1830) that a theory may be tested, amongst other things,
 - a) by confronting it with the "crucial experiment", i.e. by applying it to extreme cases that will reveal any deficiencies, and
 - b) by applying it to problems outside its intended range of explanation

I shall apply relevance theory to a communication situation where

- a) the speaker and hearer are *far apart* in respect of time, space and culture, and
- b) the author of the text had no intention whatsoever to communicate with the *present* readers of his text.

If relevance theory can survive this test, it is - according to Herschel's criteria - a good theory. Deficiencies discovered during this process may encourage practitioners of this theory to apply some more thought to it.

4. The title of the first chapter in Hirsch's *Validity in interpretation* (1964).
5. Consider, for instance, Salevsky's (1991:104) remark: "For several decades many translation scientists have sought to gain new insights primarily (and often exclusively) by concentrating on linguistic aspects, the text and/or the communicative situation in which the translating of non-literary texts take place."
6. See, however, Schifffrin (1990a), who points out that the concerns of discourse analysis often overlap with those of pragmatics and sociolinguistics. It should be noted, though, that she foresees discourse analysis to take either of two roads *in the next decade*, one of which might be the search for the relationship between text and context - the precise terrain of relevance theory. It should also be noted that the *South African* version of discourse analysis has always excluded pragmatics as a criterion for ascertaining the meaning of an utterance or Scriptural passage.
7. Consider in this context, Omanson & Sjöne (1990:401): "When it comes to problems of grammar and word meaning, we (Bible translators - FED) have well-defined techniques for that. But when it comes to what is called 'exegesis', we are often somewhat more vague."
8. In doing so, I presuppose knowledge of relevance theory itself. The interested reader not acquainted with the theory is referred to the excellent exposition by Sinclair & Wickler (1991).
9. For the sake of the readership of this journal Hebrew characters are avoided, while the transliteration is presented in a non-technical format.

- 10 There have been prolonged discussions on the interpretation of this utterance, since, depending on the approach of the individual theologian, the interpretation of this utterance may have grave theological consequences, e.g. for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.
- 11 Here one has to keep in mind Sperber and Wilson's notion of "relevance" as information that would have "contextual effect", that is, information that would be implied by the cognitive world of the audience, or that would affirm or question that cognitive world.
- 12 For a more detailed discussion, see 2.2 below.
- 13 To form a grammatical sentence one should either read (1) *bareshith bara, 'elôhim*, "in the beginning God created" (a reading witnessed to by Origen's second column Hexaplaric reading as well as by the Samaritan Pentateuch) or (2) *b^e reshith b^ero' 'elôhim* "in the beginning of God's creating". What the Massoretes did, was to contaminate these two possibilities into *b^ereshith (2) bara' 'elôhim (1)*.
- 14 In Jonah 3:3 *'elôhim* serves as an adjective "enormous (city)".
- 15 For the argument, see Von Rad 1963:47-48.
- 16 It should of course, also be kept in mind that the texts of the Old Testament, apart from being a meagre collection of ancient Israelite documents, only reflect the life and thought of the upper classes of that ancient society, since literacy was limited to upper class people only.
- 17 Consider Na'aman's statement of the problem with 2 Kings 17:3-6, "Only one Assyrian king is called by name in this passage (v.3). It is, however, clear that the reference to two different kings, Shalmaneser V and Sargon II... Thus, whereas v.3 refers explicitly to Shalmaneser, v.6b implicitly refers to Sargon II, his successor to the throne."
- 18 That is, apart from the fact that some sections of Old Testament literature originated over an extended period during which older works were reworked and edited by subsequent generations of scribes, so that many sections of the Old Testament house *various* authorial voices.
- 19 Compare, for instance, the picture of the last years of the Israelite monarchy painted in the second book of Kings with modern historical reconstructions of the related events (Na'aman 1990; Hayes & Kuan 1991).
- 20 Although the same characters are sometimes mentioned in various parts of the Old Testament, such mentioning does not imply that the *cognitive worlds* from which these characters derive their meaning coincide. For example, Jacob's battle with the demon-like figure at Priel (Gen 32) is also referred to in the book of Hosea, but these two texts are not mutually dependent. They only share an older, unknown Jacob tradition (Whitt 1991) which the two authors employed in their own way.
- 21 Yahweh, for example, is pictured in many ways in various parts of the Old Testament: as a warrior-god (Ceresko 1989), a king, a shepherd, a storm-god and sungod (Dion 1991), a minor god in Elyon's pantheon (Dt 32:8), the only God there is etc. and it is very difficult to know which image of the Israelite God to presuppose in every instance.
- 22 One could ask why Judg. 15:19 uses the active voice "Then God opened the hollow", while Gen 7:11 uses a passive construction: "And all the springs of the great abyss *were opened up*", while the *agent* in both cases is "God". In terms of relevance theory it requires more effort to recover the deleted agent, so that the author in fact guarantees the relevance of the information can be recovered through this extra effort. One could, for instance, theorise that the passive construction implies the suprapersonal/impersonal perspective on punishment for transgression (see Deist 1987:186-189), while an active formulation would imply the

personal or ethical perspective (Deist 1987:189-193). Each of these perspectives constitutes a particular ideological view of "justice".

23 So also most versions.

24 That it would not have been difficult for the ancient hearer to recover this metaphorical meaning is indicated by the fact that the term "feet" is frequently used in the Old Testament to refer to a person's private parts.

25 Del Corro (1991) devotes an article to the significance of *culture* in the formation of figurative expressions, and points out (1991:115) that the Bible abounds in figurative language. For instance, Jesus referred to himself as a vine, door, road, king, shepherd, sower, light, and bread.

26 For the problem of detecting and interpreting irony in a biblical passage, see Cameron 1990:103-104.

27 For the purpose of this short paper I leave the question of "speech acts", as treated in relevance theory, aside.

28 See, for example, the social function of "kissing" in Biblical times, as explained by Ellington (1990).

29 Consider, for example, Joab's choice of a particular messenger to inform King David of the death of his son, and the reports on the unsuccessful and successful communications between the messengers and the king (2 Sam 18:19-33). It was because the regular messenger would not be able to address the king appropriately under the circumstances that Joab sent someone else. When the first messenger arrived and broke the news indirectly, the king did not get the "message".

30 For a detailed illustration of this fact, see Breytenbach 1991.

31 Note the rhetorical use of "tog" in this passage. This adverb reveals the author's reconstruction of the ancient author's *rationality*: it is obvious that the author could not have thought X, so that only Y can be the correct interpretation of the author's utterance.

32 Human sacrifices would have been an abomination to God, Jephtah had two months time in which to reconsider his foolish vow and he certainly did so, since his name appears among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, only priests could bring sacrifices and they would certainly have refused to sacrifice a human being, and: the daughter would certainly not have spent the last two months of her life with her friends, but rather with her father.

33 Salevsky (1991:103) rightly observes, "Bible translating has always been a challenge to a translator's creativity, intuition and linguistic proficiency. Bible translators in particular are torn by the conflicting demands of science and art, of historical accuracy and present-day requirements, of their own understanding and the benefits for a particular theological view. Consequently, it is not only faithfulness to the source language ... text, but also motives for interpretation which play a crucial role."

34 Already because the Bible is a very powerful instrument of persuasion.

35 Consider, by contrast Nida's definition of translation (Nida 1985:91): "Translation consists of the reproduction in the receptor language of the message of the source language..." (emphasis added).

36 Although one should take Glassman's admonition seriously (Glassman 1981:96f.) that the hearer should not add information which is not in the "original", one also has to acknowledge

the inevitability of the hearer adding information in the process of disambiguation, filling out vague expressions, assigning referents, etc.

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