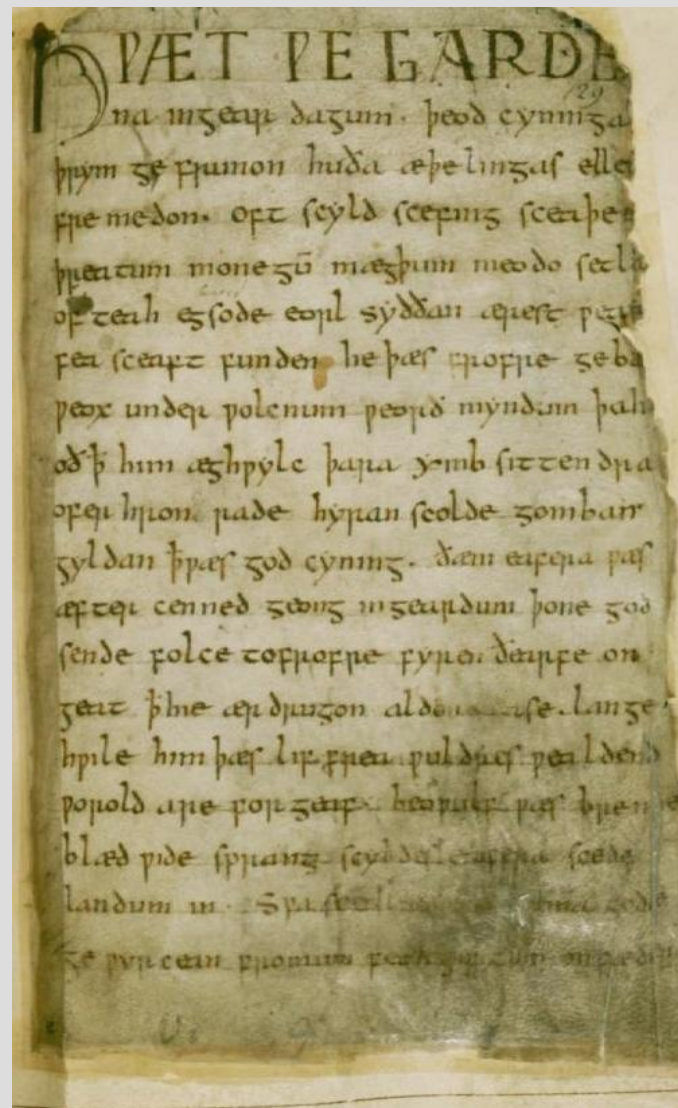


Beowulf and the Bible: Russian Formalism, translation theory, and concepts of equivalence



What it's about

A lot of terms

Theory

Formalism (into functionalism)

Common topics

Translation and translation studies

Bibles, holy books and myths

Texts

Beowulf

The Christian Bible

What it's about

The relationship

‘... the roots of early translation studies can be found in Russian Formalism ...’ (Gentzler 2001, p. 80)

Beowulf and the Bible as examples of translation issues

Russian Formalism

An overview

The text as an art object

‘Literariness’

The *ostranenie* device

Foreground and background

Functionalism

An overview

The Prague School

A natural progression of formalism

History and culture

The familiar in flux

Clarifications

Formalism into functionalism

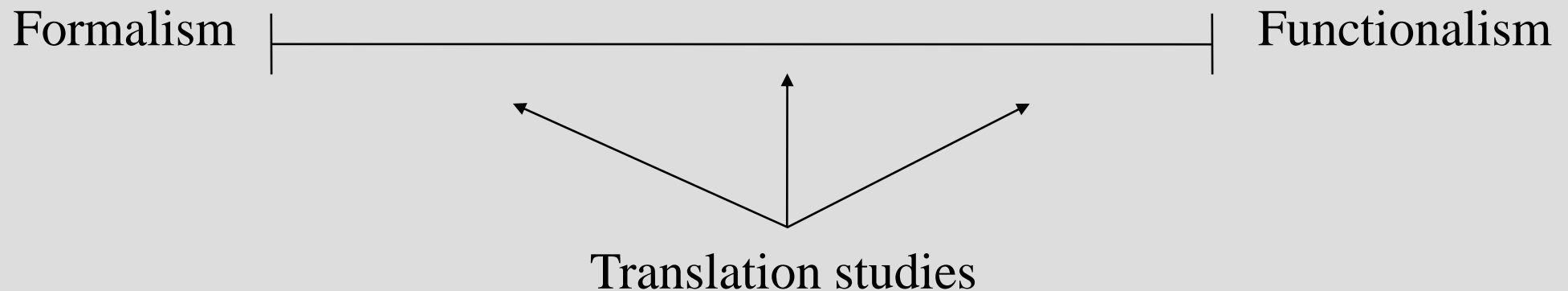
(Russian) functionalism and (Prague) structuralism

Translation studies

The traditional divide

‘Formal’ vs ‘free’
or
Formalism into functionalism

But in practice:



Translation studies

Transfer of meaning

Form vs function

The same goal, different emphasis

Beowulf

An overview

An Old English epic poem

Oral history

7th - 10th century

Heroic narrative

Four beat alliterative metre

Hwæt! Wé Gárdena in géardagum
þeodcyninga þrym gefrúnon.
hú ðá æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scéfing sceapena þréatum
monegum maégþum meodosetla oftéah.
egsode Eorle syððan aérest wearð
féasceaft funden hé þæs frófre gebád.
wéox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þáh
oð þæt him aéghwylc þára ymbsittendra
ofer hronráde hýran scolde,
gomban gyldan. þæt wæs gód cyning.

(From Slade 2002-6)

Beowulf

Examples of formalist ideas

Jiri Levy: a translation scholar with strong formalist roots

Transfer of 'artistic' literary features

Beowulf's Old English verse form

Michael Alexander's verse translation

Stress and alliteration

Oral tradition

Beowulf

Example of formalist ideas

Attend!

We have heard of the thriving of the throne of Denmark,
how the folk-kings flourished in former days,
how those royal athelings earned that glory.

Was it not *Scyld Shefing* that shook the halls,
took mead-benches, taught encroaching
foes to fear him – who, found in childhood,
lacked clothing? Yet he lived and prospered,
grew in strength and stature under the heavens
until the clans settled in the sea-coasts neighbouring
over the whale-road all must obey him
and give tribute. He was a good king!

*‘Beowulf was not written to be
readable but to be listened to.’*

(Alexander 1973, p. 49)

Beowulf

Formalism into functionalism

Jiri Levy —————> Frantisek Miko

Miko was culturally and historically aware

Seamus Heaney's verse translation

Not as rigid

A different audience

Beowulf

Formalism into functionalism

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.

We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.

This terror of the hall-troops had come far.

A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.

In the end each clan on the outlying coasts

beyond the whale-road had to yield to him

and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

**'I wanted it to be speakable by
one of those relatives.'**

(Heaney 1999, p. xxvii)

Beowulf

Functional approaches

Levy → Miko → Anton Popovic

Stylistic differences in pursuit of faithfulness

E. Talbot Donaldson's prose translation

Prose allows a faithful version

Beowulf

Functional approaches

Yes, we have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes' kings in the old days—how the princes of that people did brave deeds.

Often Scyld Shefing took mead-benches away from enemy bands, from many tribes, terrified their nobles—after the time that he was first found helpless. He lived to find comfort for that, became great under the skies, prospered in honors until every one of those who lived about him, across the whale-road, had to obey him, pay him tribute.

That was a good king.

'I am persuaded that only a prose translation, made with no other end in mind than fidelity to the original, can bring out the distinctive qualities of the work.'

(Talbot Donaldson 1975, p. xv)

The Bible

Where translation gets serious

Mirrors of the formalist-functionalist issues

Formal equivalence vs dynamic (functional) equivalence

Not just literature any more

The Word of God

Beliefs and politics

The Bible

Formal equivalence

The original Hebrew and Greek

In pursuit of God

A 'string of words' (Nida 1972, pp. 87-8)

Example:

Luke 9:17 And they ate, and were all filled: and there was taken up that which remained over to them of broken pieces, twelve baskets.

(American Standard Version, 1901)

The Bible

Dynamic equivalence

Eugene Nida's dynamic (functional) equivalence

Pursuing God by different means

Evangelical motivations: the spread of God's word

Example:

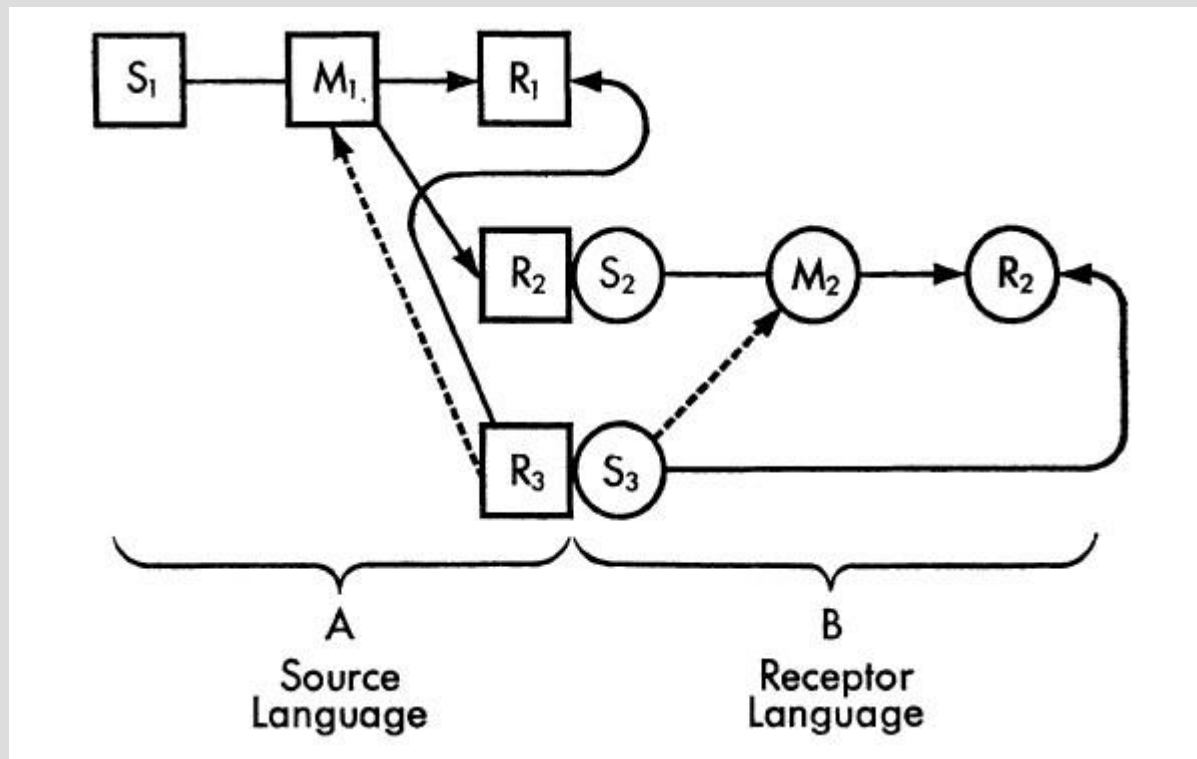
Luke 9:17 They ate, and were all filled. They gathered up twelve baskets of broken pieces that were left over.

(World English Bible, ebible.org)

The Bible

Dynamic equivalence

Nida's dynamic equivalence:



Nida, E 1972, 'Implications of contemporary linguistics for Biblical scholarship', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 91, no. 1, pp. 73-89

The Bible

'Transparent' translation

The Original Bible Project: www.originalbible.com

Still pursuing God

Aims to preserve features of the Greek and Hebrew texts

Balance of formal and dynamic

Benefits of the Russian Formalist tradition

Ancient and biblical texts

Tapping the culture

The true experience

A desire for meaning

Problems

Original meaning

A 'faithful' version?

The intentional fallacy

A deconstructive approach to translation studies

Where is God in poststructuralism?

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The importance of translation

A current example

The Gospel of Judas

