"The Dynamic Equivalence Caper"—A Response

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ABSTRACT

This article overviews and responds to Roland Boer's recent wide-ranging critique of Eugene A Nida's theory and practice of "dynamic equivalence" in Bible translating.[1] *Boer's narrowly-focused, rather insufficiently-researched evaluation of Nida's work suffers from both a lack of historical perspective and a current awareness of what many, more recent translation scholars and practitioners have been writing for the past several decades. Our rejoinder discusses some of the major misperceptions and misleading assertions that appear sequentially in the various sections of Boer's article with the aim of setting the record straight, or at least of framing the assessment of modern Bible translation endeavors and goals in a more positive and accurate light.*

A INTRODUCTION: A "CAPER"?

Why does Boer classify the dynamic equivalence (DE) approach as a "caper"? According to the Oxford Dictionary, a "caper" refers to (1) "a playful skipping

[1] Roland Boer, "The Dynamic Equivalence Caper," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation* (ed. Scott S. Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 13-23. Boer's article introduces and potentially negatively colors the collection of essays in which it appears, most of which derive from several meetings of the "Ideology, Culture, and Translation" group of the SBL, from 2005 to the present (Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 1, 4). After a short introduction by the editors, two larger sections follow—the first more theoretical ("Exploring the Intersection of Translation Studies and Critical Theory in Biblical Studies"), the second dealing with a number of case studies ("Sites in Translation"). There are several especially noteworthy contributions, for example from Part 1: Raj Nadella, "Postcolonialism, Translation, and Colonial Mimicry," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation* (eds. Scott S. Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 49-57; from Part 2: Virginia Burrus, "Augustine's Bible," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation* (eds. Scott S. Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 69-82; Flemming Nielsen, "The Earliest Greenlandic Bible," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation* (eds. Scott S. Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 113-137; and Esteban Voth, "Masculinidad en la Traducción de la Biblia," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation* (eds. Scott S. Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 169-186. However, many of the authors of this volume seem to be unaware of 21st century publications in the field of what we might term "*biblical* translation studies."

movement," or (2) "an illicit or ridiculous activity or escapade."[2] So does Boer take "dynamic equivalence" seriously or not? Indeed, it would seem that he does, based on his extended critique of this methodology, as he perceives it, and its central author, the late Eugene A Nida.[3]

The problem is that what Boer objects to, in fact sharply attacks in his essay, is Nida's thought (and that of Bible translation in general) as formulated over 40 years ago and stated in *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (*TAPOT*).[4] So what we have here is not really a "caper," but a "chimera"—a rather distorted vision of what should have been the subject of a serious contemporary overview of Bible translation.[5] The result is all too often a vigorous verbal jousting with an imaginary enemy, unfortunately contrived from an out-of-date conception. How then can this discussion be transformed into a more perceptive and productive encounter with some of the main issues and concerns that confront serious Bible translators today—indeed, many of which Eugene Nida anticipated and foreshadowed in some of his later works? That is the primary aim of the present article.

B A TWOFOLD PROBLEM—FORMAL AND FUNCTIONAL

Apparently "haunted" by "the ghost of Nida" and an "unfinished critique" of the theory and practice of dynamic equivalence, Boer returns after some years to complete his mission.[6] He immediately states his premise, as follows:

> Dynamic (or functional) equivalence, as is well known, focuses on the message. Everything may be sacrificed—words, syntax, grammar—as long as the essential content of the original text is rendered in an acceptable way in the target language.[7]

There are two major problems with this assertion—with respect to form and also to function. In the first place, to say "everything may be sacrificed" misrepresents Nida's position. On the contrary, the *original form* is not com-

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2 Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., "Caper," *COED* 2006: 207.

3 Dr. Nida passed away in Madrid on 25 August 2011 at the age of 96.

4 Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (*TAPOT*; Leiden: Brill, 1969).

5 For an overview of secular translation studies from the perspective of issues that pertain to Bible translation theory and practice, see Ernst Wendland, Review Article of Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, *OTE* 25/2 (2012): 421-454; and Ernst Wendland, "*Exploring Translation Theories*—A Review from the Perspective of Bible Translation," *JNSL* 38/2 (2012): 89-128.

6 Boer refers to a paper of "a decade ago," presumably completed in a revised paper presented at the SBL seminar of 2008 and published now as "The Dynamic Equivalence Caper." See Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," and Elliott and Boer, *Ideology*, 2.

7 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 13.

pletely or arbitrarily disregarded in *TAPOT*, as implied; one must read *TAPOT*, for example, more carefully.

1 With Reference to FORM

The following are several representative quotes that indicate the crucial concern that Nida, even from early on, had for the varied forms of the biblical text, as subsequently rendered into some modern target language (TL) *[our brief clarifications are italicized within brackets]*:

> The extent to which the forms must be changed in order to preserve the meaning will depend on the linguistic and cultural distance between languages.[8]
>
> Though style *[i.e. form]* is secondary to content, it is nevertheless important. One should not translate poetry as though it were prose, nor expository material as though it were straight narrative.[9]
>
> Dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence *[not that the latter is excluded from consideration]*. ... It is functional equivalence which is required, whether on the level of content or on the level of style.[10]
>
> Within the Christian community of any language group having a relatively long literary tradition…there are a number of special features which must be carefully considered in determining precisely what style or level of language *[i.e. formal criteria!]* one should follow in the production of a translation.[11]
>
> In translating the Bible one must recognize certain quite different styles and attempt to produce something which will be a satisfactory dynamic *[in this case also a stylistic/formal]* equivalent.[12]
>
> This functional approach to style *[form]* is dictated by our concern to understand something of the purpose of style. Primarily, these purposes (or functions) can be divided into two categories: (1) those which serve to increase efficiency and (2) those which are designed for special effects, that is to say, those which enhance interest, increase impact, or embellish the form of the message. . . . Good style must also have certain features for special effects.[13]
>
> In a translation for the more educated constituencies and especially in the more rhetorically elaborate portions of the Bible, one must

8 Nida and Taber, *Theory and Practice* (*TAPOT*), 5.
9 Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 13.
10 Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 14.
11 Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 120.
12 Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 129; cf. also 182.
13 Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 145, 147.

> inevitably do everything possible to employ in the receptor languages features . . . which will be functionally equivalent to what occurs in the Biblical text.[14]

2 With Reference to FUNCTION

The second problem with Boer's stated perspective on Nida's approach to Bible translation is related to the first. This is immediately evident in the apparent identification of "dynamic" with "functional" equivalence.[15] It is true that this may have been the case in *TAPOT*, as the preceding quotes would indicate. But we need to recall again that this text was published back in 1969. Nida clearly moved on from there, and this is most evident in another influential book that he co-authored, now with Jan de Waard, some two decades later, which was subtitled *Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (*FOLTA*).[16] Boer is either unaware of this text or has chosen to ignore it in his present assessment of Nida.

To be sure, there is still some equivocation in *FOLTA*'s terminology, but the problem is clearly recognized:

> Unfortunately, the expression "dynamic equivalence" has been misunderstood as referring to anything which may have special effect and appeal for receptors. . . . It is hoped, therefore, that the use of the expression "functional equivalence" may serve to highlight the communicative functions of translation and to avoid misunderstanding.[17]

But there is also an evident shift in focus—namely, to a multi-functional approach based on linguistic and literary forms in the analysis of the biblical text on the one hand, and its translation on the other:

> It is not right to speak of the Greek or Hebrew text (or a literal translation of such) as being merely "the form" and a freer idiomatic translation as being "the meaning." An expression in any language [whether the Bible or any TL today] consists of a set of forms which

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[14] Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 151.

[15] Later, again in the same article: "Dynamic equivalence (or '*functional* equivalence' as it is sometimes called) sets out to convey the basic content of the source text, and if it is necessary to sacrifice the structure of the original, then so be it." See Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 17.

[16] Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language To Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (*FOLTA*; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986). "The differences of functional equivalence from dynamic equivalence represent theoretical advances that are significant enough to throw into question the common practice of using the terms interchangeably." See Nigel Statham, "Dynamic Equivalence and Functional Equivalence: How Do They Differ?" *BT* 54/1 (2003): 111.

[17] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 7.

> serve to signal meaning on various levels: lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical. The translator must seek to employ a functionally equivalent set of forms which in so far as possible will match the meaning of the original source-language text.[18]

Reflecting this more precise and decided focus on the "communicative functions" of written texts, the original three of *TAPOT* (informative, expressive, imperative)[19] are increased in number and specificity to nine in *FOLTA*: metalingual, expressive, cognitive, interpersonal, informative, imperative, performative, emotive, and aesthetic.[20] These functions are applied from a "sociosemiotic" perspective that "focuses on the linguistic structures and codes which provide a key to meaning," as contextualized within a sociolinguistic approach that "looks to the social structure of the user of the language for keys to the significance of any elements in a discourse"[21]—namely, the diverse, *significant forms* of a given text and the assorted meanings which they may express.

The new emphasis on literary forms on the macro- and micro-structure of discourse that is enunciated in FOLTA is set forth in greater detail under the so-called "aesthetic" (or "poetic") function of language.[22] Two entire chapters are then devoted to elucidating the various dimensions of this concern and its application to analyzing and translating biblical texts. In ch. 6, six prominent "rhetorical [formal] processes" are delineated: repetition, compactness, connectives, rhythm, shifts in expectancies (e.g. syntactic shifts), and the manipulation of similarities and contrasts in discourse organization.[23] These literary-rhetorical forms, whether employed individually or in combination, are

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[18] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 36. The translator's task is further specified as being "essentially exegetical, in that a translation should faithfully reflect who said what to whom under what circumstances and for what purpose and should be in a form of the receptor language which does not distort the content or misrepresent the rhetorical impact or appeal" that is evoked by the literary forms of the biblical text. See de Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 40.

[19] Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 24.

[20] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 25. Statham considers such a listing to be "somewhat restrictive and schematic .. . . It might be better to think of 'functional' . . . less in terms of a strict number of universal *functions of language* as in FOLTA and more in terms of an unlimited number of culturally specific functions of linguistic entities, as Nida and Taber did themselves in TAPOT." See Nigel Statham, "Nida and 'Functional Equivalence': The Evolution of a Concept, Some Problems, and Some Possible Ways Forward," *BT* 56/1 (2005): 40, original emphasis. On the other hand, it is helpful for pedagogical reasons at least to start somewhere, in particular, with "[t]hose communicative functions which are especially relevant for the understanding of principles of translation." See de Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 25.

[21] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 77.

[22] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 31.

[23] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 86.

described in ch. 6 as expressing or embodying one or more communicative objectives, such as wholeness, aesthetic appeal, impact, appropriateness, coherence, cohesion, focus, and emphasis.[24] Subsequently, in chapters 7 and 8, various common biblical forms and functions are considered with reference to syntax and the lexicon respectively.[25] This leads to a number of suggested translation and publication "procedures,"[26] a helpful overview that highlights the need for a careful mutual consultation of all interested parties during the process—it is not simply a matter, as Boer suggests, of translators' rendering "the essential content of the original text. . . in an acceptable way in the target language":[27]

> A number of principles can be derived from a careful study of what is needed by and acceptable to the constituency for whom the translation is being prepared, but the actual formulation of principles [and procedures] must be worked out by the team of translators in close cooperation with consultants and representatives of the sponsoring organization [and the wider community that they represent].[28]

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[24] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 80.

[25] Statham feels that the introduction of *FOLTA* has led to "the creation of a vacuum in the area of a *simple, teachable technique* for arriving at natural syntactic equivalents." See Statham, "Dynamic Equivalence," 41, emphasis added. As a result, "a great deal of effort will need to be expended on thinking out practical ways of helping those who are not trained linguists or rhetoricians to 'follow' the teachings of a top-down approach to translation within the extremely limited time-frames of translation workshops and field teaching sessions." See Statham, "Dynamic Equivalence," 42. However, here it is important to point out that *FOLTA* presupposes and builds upon the principles discussed in *TAPOT*: "The three basic phases in the translation process are analysis, transfer, and restructuring, as described in considerable detail in *Theory and Practice of Translation*." See de Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 195; cf. 194-199.

Furthermore, since the appearance of *FOLTA* several practical methodologies have been developed on the basis of field testing to serve as models for adaptation by others, for example: (a) "a form-functional, text-comparative method," (b) a "literary-rhetorical analysis technique," and (c) "a ten-step exegetical methodology" leading "from analysis to synthesis in translation." See respectively: Ernst Wendland, "A Form-Functional, Text-Comparative Method of Translating, Teaching, and Checking," *Notes on Translation* 14/1 (2000); Ernst Wendland, *Translating the Literature of Scripture: A Literary-Rhetorical Approach to Bible Translation* (Dallas: SIL International, 2004), 229-264; Ernst Wendland, *LiFE-Style Translating: A Workbook for Bible Translators* (2nd ed., Dallas: SIL International, 2011), 126-158.

[26] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, Appendix B.

[27] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 13.

[28] De Waard and Nida, *FOLTA*, 190; words in brackets added from the context.

Clearly, Bible translation for Nida (and colleagues), even 25 years ago, involved considerably more than "content" alone[29] and was much more of a complex, sophisticated, audience-engaging enterprise[30] than what is often portrayed by contemporary critics living many years after-the-fact (and Boer is not the only one).[31]

C BACKGROUND

In a brief overview of Nida's professional life and influence, Boer draws attention to the former's "strictly technical works on linguistic theory and a very evangelical stream of publications."[32] Unfortunately, Boer again restricts himself to a mere mention of some of Nida's earlier works[33] and concludes that "the single great idea of Nida's life work . . . [was] dynamic equivalence as the

[29] Nevertheless, it must be admitted that "while the theory represented here [in *FOLTA*] grapples with the connection between text and context, it still locates meaning within the text, and does not represent a paradigm shift in translation theory within the Bible Society movement." See Stephen Pattemore, "Framing Nida: The Relevance of Translation Theory in the United Bible Societies," in *A History of Bible Translation* (ed. Philip A. Noss; Rome: American Bible Society/Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007), 228.

[30] "Too often translators work in isolation from a believing community and without sufficient regard for what receptors want or expect in a translation. . . . Evangelical concerns to make the text more readable have often arisen from underestimating the capacities of receptors. As a result, receptor-language persons who have acquired some education have frequently come to repudiate the intentions of the translators as being nothing less than pernicious paternalism." See Eugene A. Nida and Wm. D. Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 61.

[31] See, for example, Wayne Grudem, "Are Only *Some* Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God," in *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (eds. Wayne Grudem, *et al*.; Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 50-55; Stephen Prickett, *Word and The Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 10-36; Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 116-118.

[32] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 14-15.

[33] For a more accurate perspective, see Wendy Porter, "A Brief Look at the Life and Works of Eugene Albert Nida," *BT* 56/1 (2005); Jonathan M. Watt, "The Contributions of Eugene A. Nida to Sociolinguistics," *BT* 56/1 (2005). Note also the six-plus page "Selective Bibliography" in Eugene A. Nida, *Fascinated by Languages* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003), 145-151. For an extensive review of Nida's work and the influence of *TAPOT* in relation to Bible translation as well as translation studies in general, see Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 2007. Earlier, less detailed surveys are found in Aloo Mojola and Ernst Wendland, "Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies," in *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* (ed. Timothy Wilt; Manchester: St Jerome, 2003), 1-25; also Stanley E. Porter, "Eugene Nida and Translation," *BT* 56/1 (2005): 8-19.

key to the 'science of translating.'"[34] He was so successful in his seemingly singular mission that "by and large it [DE] has become translation orthodoxy."[35] While that assertion may have been largely true in the 1970s and perhaps 1980s as well, this methodological pre-eminence certainly did not last, as Boer might have discovered had he done a little more reading in the history of Bible translation studies. Furthermore, Nida was no mono-dimensional scholar with just a single "great idea" to his credit. In fact, for "over the course of his career he [exhibited] a breadth of scholarship in several disciplines that few scholars can match…in linguistics, biblical studies, missiology, semiotics, lexicography, and translation studies, to name the major areas."[36]

There are several inaccuracies that further becloud Boer's overview of the "background" to Nida's notion of dynamic equivalence theory and practice.[37] First of all, he seems to associate Nida more with "a handful of characters from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)/Wycliffe Bible Translators,"[38] rather than with the American Bible Society, which Nida served on a part-time basis (along with SIL) from 1943 and then full-time as Secretary for Translations from 1953 until his retirement nearly thirty years later.[39]

Next, there is Boer's over-simplification of the DE methodology, which he feels is "disarmingly simple"; thus, "what the translator needs to do is to seek equivalence between the experience of current receptors and those of original receptors."[40] Again, a fairer reading of *TAPOT* alone and its three-stage approach to translating, *analysis—transfer—restructuring*,[41] should have dispelled that notion. Boer accuses Nida of promoting an inaccurate "con-

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[34] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 15.

[35] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 15.

[36] Philip C. Stine, *Let the Words Be Written: The Lasting Influence of Eugene A. Nida* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 180. Furthermore, "It is quite remarkable, for example, for someone to be honored by both the Linguistic Society of America and the Society of Biblical Literature." See Stine, *Let the Words Be Written*, 180. See also a listing of eight of Nida's major accomplishments in Bible translation as noted by the UBS historian, Edwin H. Robertson, *Taking the Word to the World: Fifty Years of the United Bible Societies* (Nashville: Nelson, 1996), 59-60.

[37] The term "theory" is used merely for convenience. Strictly speaking, "the foundational works of Nida and colleagues. . . are based on a wide array of theoretical foundations largely in the area of linguistics and communication theory. . . " See Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 220.

[38] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 14. The same mistaken impression is given in the book's "Introduction." See Scott Elliott and Roland Boer, "Introduction," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation* (eds. Scott Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 2.

[39] Stine, *Let the Words Be Written*, 29-30.

[40] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 15.

[41] Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, chs. 3-7.

tainer" model of language and translation,[42] and while that may have been true of some of his followers on an introductory level,[43] that was never the case with Nida himself. This "is too reductionistic a view of [early] Nida's approach" which does not recognize or fully appreciate *TAPOT*'s presentation of how "interpersonal communication takes place in a sociolinguistic and institutional context that shapes the meaning of the message and the response of the receptors."[44]

Finally, Boer makes the claim that DE as described in *TAPOT* "by and large. . . has become translation orthodoxy":[45]

> To my knowledge, dynamic equivalence is the dominant method used by both the various Bible Societies and Wycliffe Bible Translators, especially with translations into indigenous languages.[46]

However, Pattemore's lengthy historical survey of UBS translation approaches clearly shows that this is not the case, citing "voices" both within and without the UBS.[47] Boer has apparently missed the whole "frames of reference" and "literary functional equivalence" movements within the UBS.[48] Thus, "[t]here is no doubt that the emergence of translation studies as an autonomous discipline has helped to move us [i.e. those involved in Bible translation] far beyond the understanding of translation as conceived for example in TAPOT."[49] And the notion of what constitutes "translation" in terms of theory and practice has moved further in the direction of a new paradigm by those who have adopted the perspective of the cognitive-inferential approach of "relevance theory."[50] Boer does not seem to be aware of (at least he does not

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42 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 16.

43 Boer cites the entry-level text of Christine A. Kilham, *Translation Time: An Introductory Course in Translation* (Darwin: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1991).

44 Stine, *Let the Words Be Written*, 156.

45 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 15.

46 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 13. This mistaken assertion is echoed in the chapter following Boer's: "The theory of dynamic equivalence certainly dominates the field." See K. Jason Coker, "Translating From This Place: Social Location and Translation," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation* (eds. Scott S. Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 30.

47 Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 228-250.

48 See for example: Timothy Wilt, ed., *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2003); Wendland, *Translating the Literature*.

49 Mojola and Wendland, "Scripture Translation," 25.

50 See for example: Ernst-August Gutt, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (Dallas and New York: Summer Institute of Linguistics and United Bible Societies, 1992); Stephen Pattemore, *Souls Under the Altar: Relevance Theory and the Discourse Structure of Revelation* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003); Harriet Hill, *et al*., *Bible Translation Basics: Communicating Scripture in a Relevant Way* (Dallas: SIL International, 2011).

cite) any such non-Nidan, post-*TAPOT* studies in his discussion of "the dynamic equivalence caper."

D PARAPHRASE WITH A TWIST

In the section with the above heading, Boer critiques Nida and DE translation using a slightly different tack. He feels that this approach became popular simply because of "sustained promotion," the "problem" being that "dynamic equivalence is not a particularly new idea":

> Nida has merely given new names—dynamic versus formal equivalence—to an old Greek distinction between metaphrase and paraphrase.[51]

While his little historical survey of translation terminology is useful, Boer seeks to imply motive to Nida and the development of DE "in this potted history":

> He seeks to recover an older practice of paraphrase from the nineteenth century and earlier. He favors paraphrase over metaphrase, transparency over fidelity. . . [52]

The problem with Boer's implication is that it crucially depends on one's definition or evaluation of "fidelity": should this criterion be based on the visible linguistic *forms* of the biblical text or on their ascribed *functions*, including that of conveying the basic semantic content of the original (the "informative" function)? Boer does not clarify this distinction, but goes on to suggest, rather disingenuously so, that Nida's primary evangelically-motivated innovation consisted in this, namely, that he was able to convince (many) Bible translators and their supporters that fidelity must be defined in relation to content, not form, as was the case in pre-Nidan days: "The twist was to shift the values of the terms themselves: a *faithful* translation is in fact paraphrase, reader-directed, and free."[53] By means of this deft of argument then "[w]hat everyone in Nida's own context thought was faithful is not so."[54] It is not difficult to discern the speciousness of Boer's own argument here, as he subtly privileges his own, preferred definition of "fidelity" in translating. As many practicing translation consultants have discovered when checking through some vernacular draft version, fidelity to the linguistic form of the biblical text frequently results in gross infidelity to its communicative purpose and function.

To be sure, the issue of clear *definition* is a vital aspect of any *methodology*, and terminology should be chosen that best supports and elucidates

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51 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 16.
52 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 17.
53 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 18.
54 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 18.

both. Indeed, if the term "functional equivalence" is confusing or misleading, it can and should be replaced. As Statham suggests:

> Many writers on Bible translation get along very well without using the term "functional equivalent," simply using "natural equivalent," "closest natural equivalent," or even "meaning-based." These terms are more generic than "functional equivalent" and less liable to hermeneutical misunderstanding.[55]

E INSTRUMENTAL FORM

In this section, Boer enlists a number of Nida's critics in an attempt to bolster his own arguments against a DE approach to translation:[56]

> Crudely put, Nida sees the form of a language (its syntax, grammar, style, lilt, unique sounds, and complexities) in two ways: as a means or instrument to achieve communication or as a hurdle to overcome.[57]

Thus, according to Boer, "Dynamic equivalence has an instrumental view of form";[58] therefore, "If the form of a language can be an instrument in that process [the communication of the message], then well and good; but if not, then it becomes a problem that must be tackled and solved."[59] Again, Boer is flogging the old (but not quite dead!) horse of the *TAPOT* era. Contrast that with what Nida himself later wrote on the subject—first some earlier observations:

> It is essential to recognize that the meaning of a text is signaled by a number of different features, including sounds, words, grammatical constructions, and rhetorical devices. . . .
>
> It is impossible to avoid completely the implications of literary analysis when speaking of the Bible. To do so would rob the Scrip-

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[55] Statham, "Functional Equivalence," 43. Relevance theorists of course have developed terminology that better reflects a RT approach to Bible translating, e.g. "processing effort, benefits, relevance." See Hill *et al*., *Bible Translation Basics*, 29-34; cf. Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 251-260.

[56] Barnstone, for example, asserts that anyone [like Nida, implied] "who argues that meaning is located in the content, without thought for 'the sound, style, tone and form,' is completely off the mark." See Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 19, with reference to Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 62-63. On the other hand, Boer does pause to make (sarcastic) mention of the works of a pair of alleged Nida "groupies," namely, "Philip Stine's *Let the Words Be Written* (2004), which reads like a preemptive eulogy, or Ma's more expository study (2003)." See Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 18.

[57] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 19.

[58] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 14.

[59] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 19.

> tures of much of their dynamic significance. In fact, an appreciation of the literary [including formal] qualities of biblical texts can only lead to a greater appreciation of their relevance. . . .
>
> One must calculate not only how best to render a particular [biblical] rhetorical feature, but how to compensate for the loss of impact by incorporating into the text [formal] rhetorical features of the receptor language which may not specifically represent corresponding features in the source text.[60]

These quotes from Nida would certainly seem to indicate considerable concern for the formal features of both SL and TL texts in the process of translation. Nida's analyses of the literary-rhetorical forms and functions of biblical texts became increasingly more refined and insightful over the years. Towards the end of his writing career then, he would observe:[61]

> The fascination of the Bible for both believers and non-believers may be explained to some extent by the remarkable literary character of the texts. . . . Note the dramatic scene in Judges 5.28-30 ... This is highly sophisticated dramatic poetry, as fine as Homer produced. . . .
>
> [On the other hand], rarely are Bible translators introduced to the rich formal structures of even New Testament literature. . . . The general lack of stylistic sensitivity to the literary forms of a local language has repeatedly impressed me. The problem is especially acute in languages which have only an oral literature, which may be very rich indeed. . .

Again, this does not sound like a literary (formal) philistine writing—someone who "is a craftsman first, artist a distant second. . . [who] has little time for the useless pursuits of literary critics with their attention to style, sound, structure, and the shape of language."[62]

Ostensibly to highlight Nida's lack of literary sensitivity,[63] Boer makes a brief reference to the work of the Russian Formalist school of literary criticism:

> In their effort at defamiliarizing (*Ostranenie*) texts, the formalists would shift the old values attaching the relation between form and

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[60] Eugene A. Nida *et al*., *Style and Discourse, with Special Reference to the Greek New Testament* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1983), 1, 157, 170.

[61] Nida, *Fascinated by Languages*, 81-82.

[62] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 19.

[63] "For these reasons *[i.e. the spurious ones just stated]*, asserting that form is important and that any literary critic worth his or her salt knows it to be so has little critical impact on Nida's approach." See Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 19.

> content. So the form is not an instrument for the content to appear, but vice-versa: the content is the means for the form.[64]

But Boer seems to have misread these Formalist critics too (he does not cite any). In the first place, they did not so much "defamiliarize" texts in their own writings, but rather pointed out examples of this feature (or their lack) in the literary works of others. More importantly, Boer has apparently missed the essential Formalist agenda, which was, in fact, just the opposite of his claim—namely, to draw attention to the manifestation of literary forms used to highlight, enhance, or otherwise emphasize a text's content as well as its aesthetic impact, for example:[65]

> *[This is]* the artistic trademark—that is, we find material *[i.e. literary forms, such as parallelism and imagery]* obviously created to remove the automatism of perception; the author's purpose is to create the vision which results from that deautomatized perception. A work is created "artistically" so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of perception.[66]

And even on the macro-structure of a literary text, a novel for example, the function of its forms is primarily to serve its content:

> The aesthetic function of the plot *[i.e. the formal arrangement of thematic elements, or "motifs"]* is precisely this bringing of an arrangement of motifs to the attention of the reader.[67]

However, Nida was well aware of the writings of the Russian Formalists, especially the most influential of them all:

> As Roman Jakobson (1960) has pointed out, one crucial feature of literature results from the effect of the poetic function which projects "the principal of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination." In general, this means that one selects a theme, employs a number of motifs, organizes the text in terms of a

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64 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 19-20.

65 It is rather ironic that Boer should refer to the Russian Formalists in contrast to Nida, whom he accuses of manipulating a translation in order to "recreate that impact *[i.e. as discerned in the biblical text]* on the target audience of the translation." See Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 15. Thus, the primary interest of the Formalists was to highlight the impact and appeal of artistic writing "because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged." See Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

66 Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 22; added contextual clarification in italics.

67 Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. (eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 68.

> particular genre and incorporates those rhetorical or stylistic features which will appropriately highlight various aspects of the message.[68]

To be fair, a translation scholar with such critical interests and insights cannot justifiably be accused of rank formal "instrumentalism"[69] or of being "profoundly logocentric."[70]

F GNOSTIC INCARNATIONS

In this section, Boer decides to "switch tactics" in his critique of Nida, now resorting to some spurious theology to make the point that "Nida's model of dynamic equivalence makes use of a gnostic Christology":[71]

> Dynamic equivalence follows a gnostic incarnational model: while the "Word" remains the same, it may move from body to body.[72]

Indeed, here Boer, who personally has "nothing against the Gnostics per se,"[73] approaches what amounts to an *argumentum ad hominem*—which was perhaps his purpose in any case. One might come to this conclusion based on Boer's own argument: Why single Nida out as being "gnostic" if it is, in fact, true that he has simply recycled the ancient "paraphrase" approach to translating, which was "the popular mode of translating into English up until the early nineteenth century"?[74]

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68 Nida *et al*., *Style and Discourse*, 153.

69 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 14, 18-20.

70 "To Roland Boer's description of dynamic equivalence, I would add only that this approach to translation is profoundly logocentric." See George Aichele, "The Translator's Dilemma: A Response to Boer, Coker, Elliott, and Nadella," in *Ideology, Culture, and Translation.* (eds. Scott Elliott and Roland Boer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 59. The reason is this: "Because dynamic equivalence favors the signified thought or content of a message at the expense of the signifier, it is logocentric" (Aichele, "Translator's Dilemma," 59). According to the dictionary, "logocentric" is a view that regards "words and language as a fundamental expression of an external reality." See Soanes and Stevenson, *COED* 2006: 839. However, the previous discussion, including the many quotes from Nida himself, would indicate that this is not his perspective at all. In fact, one could turn the tables and make the claim (contra Aichele, "Translator's Dilemma," 60) that "logocentrism" is actually the position of those who favor or promote "formal equivalence," hence privileging "the signifier at the expense of the signified thought or content of a message"—where the linguistic form of a text becomes its essential reality and the focus of attention.

71 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 20.

72 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 14; cf. Elliott and Boer, "Introduction," 2.

73 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 21.

74 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 17.

But Boer continues his ill-conceived foray into theology and church history as follows:

> The problem for Nida is that had he been alive in the early centuries of the Christian era when one council after another hammered out the core doctrines of the church (usually under imperial pressure for a unified ideology), he would have voted with the Gnostics. Why? His theory of translation assumes a definable, clear, and pure message that may take on many different languages without being tainted by them. So also the gnostic Christ inhabited the body of Jesus only to depart this outer casing at will when the going got tough. . . [75]

Such a mischievous analogy betrays not only a questionable motive, but also certain level of ignorance about the object of his criticism. Indeed, way back in the days of *TAPOT* (had Boer bothered to look), Nida and other DE proponents clearly recognized the fallacy of any position which would assert "that form has virtually no role to play in the production of this message"—i.e. "the 'Word.'"[76] At the very beginning of *TAPOT*, the first three "new attitudes with respect to receptor languages" are these:[77]

- Each language has its own genius.[78]
- To communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language.[79]
- Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the message.[80]

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[75] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 21. From Boer's perspective, in Nida's "gnostic christological model of translation. . . the content of the message (soul) can move freely from one language (flesh) to another without being affected by that language." See Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 22. In keeping with Western linguistic theories and universalistic thinking of *TAPOT*'s times (the 1960s), Nida did have a rather optimistic view of translatability and of the possibility of transferring complete "messages" across languages, cultures, and world-views.

[76] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 21.

[77] Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 3-4, original italics.

[78] "That is to say, each language possesses certain distinctive characteristics which give it a special character, e.g., . . ." See Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 3-4.

[79] "Rather than bemoan the lack of some feature in a language, one must respect the features of the receptor language and exploit the potentialities of the language to the greatest possible extent. . . ." See Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 4.

[80] "It must be said, however, that if the form in which a message is expressed is an essential element of its significance, there is a very distinct limitation in communicating its significance from one language to another. . . *[for example]*, the rhythm of

These principles were but the rudimentary germs of an admittedly "meaning-based" approach[81] (not only "content," as stressed by Boer)[82] that was later fleshed out by Nida and his followers in "functional equivalence" (as well as by several notable non-DE proponents) into some much more sophisticated and discerning methodologies that focus in detail on both SL and TL linguistic and literary forms.[83]

H CONCLUSION: IMPERIALISTIC AND CAPITALISTIC MOTIVATION?

In his final section, Boer moves from theology into economic theory and an equally daring, but deceptive historical analogy between DE translation and what has transpired in imperialistic politics. Thus, "[t]he 'message' of the Bible becomes a pure expression of the commodity form and as such is a symptom of globalized capitalism."[84] To be more specific:

> Nida's dynamic equivalence is an excellent complement to that *[20th century US]* imperialism, coupled as it was with untiring fieldwork enabled by cheap and rapid transport. . . . So also with the resolute focus on the singular message of the Bible (again, assuming what one knows what it is): it is infinitely exchangeable, moving from one language to another with more or less ease. That message is not to be hindered by any local uses (the distinctive sounds and

Hebrew poetry, the acrostic features of many poems, and the frequent intentional alliteration." See Nida and Taber, *TAPOT*, 4.

[81] Various cognitive-based linguistic approaches to translation have taught us that the many formal and semantic differences between two language-cultures and their respective thought-worlds (world-views) make it impossible to communicate with complete functional equivalence between them, even with the addition of a host of readily available paratextual aids, such as, explanatory footnotes, topical headings, illustrations, a glossary, and so forth. There are only varying degrees of "relevant" textual-conceptual "resemblance" possible and ultimately achievable in any translation. See Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 253-254. "The translator cannot hope to make the message so clear that any reader can fully understand it without any reference whatsoever to the presuppositions that underlie the biblical account. That is to say, the translator cannot be expected to so transpose the message linguistically and culturally that it will fit completely within the interpretive frame of the receptor culture." See Nida and Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures*, 29.

[82] For example, Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence, 21.

[83] For example, Pattemore, *Souls Under the Altar*; Wendland, *LiFE-Style Translating*.

[84] Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 14. Furthermore, "the parallels between dynamic equivalence with commodity relations under capitalism suggest that it is the ideal (and therefore problematic) type of translation for our own era." See Elliott and Boer, "Introduction," 2.

> shapes of a language), for it is above all an exchangeable commodity.[85]

Boer here once more recycles his erroneous understanding of DE theory and practice by employing some fallacious economic and political metaphorical reasoning. However, this will get him no farther in the minds of those who know anything about the extensive post-*TAPOT* field of *biblical translation studies*, as the cited documentation above has shown. Unfortunately, the misinformation of Boer's article might negatively prejudice the opinion of the readers of *Ideology, Culture, and Translation*, including many biblical scholars, who do not have much of a background in this highly specialized and diversified field. In short, what began perhaps as a "caper" has turned out to be a rather serious, albeit misplaced accusation, or at best a very misleading impression of Eugene A. Nida and his influential work!

The theoretical and practical notions involved in Bible translation have developed considerably since the days of Nida's retirement. That entire story has been omitted from Boer's "caper" due to his overly-cynical focus upon Nida—the man, his mission, and his method. There have been two main movements during the past two decades in critical reaction to, and in notable advancement of Nida's foundational work in this field. These developments have been nicely summarized by Pattemore:[86]

> *[One]* outcome has been a theoretical framework for the ongoing translational activity of the UBS based on a pragmatic communication model, a context-sensitive literary approach to text, and a functionalist view of the parameters of translation. . . . The second movement. . . is the attempt to provide a fundamentally different paradigm for translation based on a Relevance-Theoretic understanding of the psychology of communication. . . *[which]* can form the basis of a translation theory which includes the literary and sociological sensitivities of the first approach…[87]

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85 Boer, "Dynamic Equivalence," 22-23.

86 Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 263.

87 It may be possible in future to combine several different contemporary approaches to translation into a single unified "model" (or method), as alluded to in Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 263. We might first suggest a general theoretical framework based on cognitive linguistics, in particular, "frame semantics." See Lourens de Vries, "Introduction: Methodology of Bible Translation," in *A History of Bible Translation* (ed. Philip A. Noss; Rome: American Bible Society, 2007), 276-277; Timothy Wilt and Ernst Wendland, *Scripture Frames & Framing: A Workbook for Bible Translators* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2008); Ernst Wendland, "Framing the Frames: A Theoretical Framework for the Cognitive Notion of 'Frames of Reference,'" *JT* 6/1 (2011): 27-51. Within this cognitive framework, the pragmatic-inferential translation theory of "relevance" would effectively operate. See for example, Gutt, *Relevance Theory*; Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 251-262. The latter could, in turn, be further specified

To conclude then on a positive, more fully informed note then, how should we evaluate Nida's life and work?

> UBS *[and SIL]* translation scholarship is in robust shape and actively engaging significant issues both internal and externally, and this is due in no small measure to the precedent established by Eugene Nida, and this forms a fitting frame for the heritage he has entrusted to us.[88]

We warmly welcome biblical (especially *OT*!) scholars, translation practitioners, and all those engaged in related, interdisciplinary academic fields of the SBL to learn more about this rich, still developing heritage—and further, to actually taste the fruits of its enduring labors by participating in a current Bible translation project somewhere in the world.

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procedure-wise by functionalist methods such as "*Skopos* Theory" (*skopostheorie*). See Lourens de Vries, "Bible Translations: Forms and Functions," *BT* 52/3 (2001): 306-319; Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997); Pattemore; "Framing Nida," 250; Wendland, *Translating the Literature*, 50-53. The preceding translation techniques would include "functional equivalence" as discussed above, and perhaps (given the necessary human resources and a suitable setting) even "literary functional equivalence." See Wendland, *LiFE-Style Translating*.

[88] Pattemore, "Framing Nida," 263.

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