Do Formal Equivalent Translations Reflect a Higher View of Plenary, Verbal Inspiration?

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In this paper I'll address the claim that formal equivalent translations show a higher view of inspiration since they try to translate every Greek and Hebrew word. But I need to start with a few disclaimers.

- I was the New Testament chair of the ESV for ten years.
- I have been on the CBT (Committee on Bible Translation) that controls the text of the NIV since 2010.
- And as you might suspect, I'm going to use Greek examples, even though the issues raised by translating Hebrew are much more severe than translating Greek.

DEFINE TERMS

First, let's agree on our categories of translations. Much of the current misunderstanding is due to putting Bible translations in the wrong category, or putting two translations together that should be kept separate. I believe there are five, not two or three, categories of translations, and have written in detail on this point.[1]

1. The category of "literal" translations should only include interlinears, and in fact I don't like the term "literal" at all since we use the word in a way that is contrary to its actual meaning. The word "literal," in any English dictionary, literally means "without embellishment," and it should never be used in a discussion of translations.

There is no such thing as a literal meaning of a word — what does λόγος "literally" mean? — no such thing as a literal translation of a verse, and therefore there is no such thing as a "literal translation"[2] or even an "essentially literal" translation. Even interlinears are tech-

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[1] *What I Have Learned About Greek & Translation Since Joining the CBT.* Downloaded at BillMounce.com/personal

[2] See Van Leeuwen on the KJV. "I prefer not to call it 'literal' because translations always add, change, and subtract from the original. The only literal Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek" ("We Really *Do* Need Another Bible Translation," *Christianity Today* 45 no 13 (October 22, 2001).

nically not literal but are, to some degree, interpretive. The minute you translate τοῦ θεοῦ as "of God," you are no longer literal but interpreting a genitive noun construction with a prepositional phrase and dropping ὁ, a word that actually has no precise equivalent in English.

No competent translator should say that their translation is literal. The problem is that the folks in our churches mistakenly equate "literal" with "word-for-word" and think that means "accurate." It is our responsibility to help people see the error in this thinking.

2. "Formal equivalent" refers to translations that show a strong preference for replicating the form of the Greek and Hebrew, and only move to meaning when translating words doesn't make sense. This category includes the NASB, ESV, CSB [to some extent], KJV, RSV, and NRSV (except for gender language).[1] I also use the term "direct translation" for this category.

The ESV has invented a category called "essentially literal," which only means they are more willing than others to leave the original words and translate meaning. However, when Grudem includes the NASB and RSV in this category, I wonder if there are any translations left for the category of "formal equivalent." I suspect that "essentially literal" is an attempt to abandon the linguistic baggage of formal equivalence.[2] For the purpose of this paper, I place the ESV, along with many other fine translations, in the category of "formal equivalent," acknowledging their commitment to translate the *meaning* of every word and not just every word.

3. "Functional equivalent" refers to the translation process that places primary emphasis on the meaning of each of the original words understood in context. These translations are

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[1] "Are Only *Some* Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God?" Translating Truth (Crossway, 2005) 30. Grudem mistakenly includes the NET, which shows a freedom in translating which I believe puts it in the category of "functional equivalence."

[2] The CSB has also invented a term, "optimal equivalence," which is basically meaningless. All their statistics are based on the correlation of English words to the original as defined by their reverse interlinears, hence predisposing them to fit in the "formal equivalent" camp.

more willing to move to meaning more quickly than formal equivalent translations, but they still try to honor the structure of the original if possible. This is where the NIV and NET fit.

Some people include the NLT in this category, but that is far from accurate. Whatever terms you use, the NIV and the NLT are fundamentally different and must be kept in separate categories.[1]

4. "Natural language" translations are those that follow the teaching of Eugene Nida and his emphasis on the reader's response.[2] For the sake of clarity, and since Nida created the term "dynamic equivalent," I use the term "dynamic" for natural language translations, not functional equivalent translations. This is where the NLT belongs, and much of the criticism of functional equivalent translations really belongs in this category.[3]

5. I have no term for the fifth category other than perhaps "paraphrase," but even that is an improper title since the word "paraphrase" refers to the simplification of a text in the *same* language. So the original *Living Bible* is a true paraphrase of the ASV, and I also put *The Message* here as well.

So with these clarifications, here are my questions. (1) What are the implications of the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration in relationship to translation theory, if any? (2) Is translation about translating every *word*, or is it about translating the *meaning* of every word?

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[1] For example, the NIV would never add that the sailors were afraid of the the sandbars of Syrtis "off the African coast" (Acts 27:17).

[2] *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber (Leiden: Brill, 1974). *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, Jan de Waard anf Eugene Nida (Nashville: Nelson, 1986).

[3] I think translations of ancient writings should put the modern reader back into the ancient culture and challenge him or her to understand the meaning of the text in its original context. Likewise, a modern translation of an ancient Spanish work into German should not give the impression that the events actually happened in today's Germany.

1. PLENARY VERBAL INSPIRATION

2 Timothy 3:16 defines "inspiration" as the doctrine that Scripture ultimately comes from God, that it is "God-breathed." 2 Peter 1:21 adds that the authors were in some way "carried along (φερόμενοι) by the Holy Spirit."[1]

I believe this is all the further we dare go in defining what inspiration *must* mean. It would be nice if Peter had defined what he meant by "carried along," but φέρω is too general a word to give us any specificity. The idea that God determined every single word and every grammatical construction simply goes beyond what Scripture says about itself, and we should be cautious at being more specific than Scripture is.

A. Plenary Inspiration

"Plenary inspiration" is the view that all of Scripture is God-breathed. This is in accordance with Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 3:16, and it is included in ETS' statement of faith: "The Bible alone, and the Bible *in its entirety*, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs" (italics mine).[2] In my commentary, I defend the translation "All Scripture is inspired" rather than "All Scripture that is inspired," and I suggest that translating πᾶς as "every" is even more emphatic; every single statement and affirmation in Scripture is God-breathed.[3]

But does this mean that every single *word* should be represented in translation, or does it mean that the *meaning* of every single word should be represented in translation? I have two responses.

1. Inspiration applies to the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, not the English. As Mark Strauss wrote several years ago, "all participants in this debate believe that all the *Hebrew and Greek*

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[1] To these two verses could be added the prophetic statements in the Hebrew Testament that are prefaced by the introductory formula, "thus says the Lord," and a few other passages that claim to be the dictated words of God such as in Revelation.

[2] It is also affirmed in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. "We affirm that the written Word *in its entirety* is revelation given by God" (italics mine).

[3] *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Zondervan, 200) 565–68.

words of Scripture are fully inspired. The question we must ask is whether the *meaning* of those Greek and Hebrew words is most accurately rendered in English by following a literal method or a more idiomatic one."[1]

Having been on both the ESV and NIV committees, I can assure you that all of us believe that all of the Hebrew and Greek words are inspired. Where we differ is in how to express those words in meaningful English.

2. No translation explicitly translates every word. Formal equivalent translations try to translate every single word, but they are admittedly not successful.[2] I am thankful that Grudem agrees on this point, as we will see.

- Who translates ὁ θεός as "the God"? Rather, they all drop out the article 983 times.

- Who translates every μέν or δέ or initial καί?

- What translation always indicates the expected answer of a question prefaced with οὐ or μή?

The answer is of course, not a single one. So in what sense is any translation "literal" when in fact every single verse in the Bible is not translated word-for-word.[3] Despite best intentions or marketing ploys or the misunderstandings running through our churches, no English translation translates every Greek word but in fact omits thousands of words (and as we will see, adds thousands more).

I find myself in good company with Grudem when he says the *meaning* of every word must be translated.[4] He is not asking for every Greek word to be explicitly translated. He is saying that if a word expresses a specific meaning, then that meaning must make its way into

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[1] "Do literal Bible versions show greater respect for plenary inspiration? (A response to Wayne Grudem)." Paper delivered at the ETS Annual Meeting, Nov. 16, 2005. Page 2.

[2] See the Preface in the NASB.

[3] Except maybe John 11:35, "Jesus wept" (ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς)? O, wait a minute, the Greek says "wept the Jesus" and saying "Jesus wept" doesn't translate a third of the sentence, the article before Ἰησοῦς. And if the aorist ἐδάκρυσεν is inceptive, then it should be translated "burst into tears," so even the simple form "wept" is a translation based on the translators view of the word's meaning.

[4] Grudem, Only *Some* Words op. cit., 20.

the translation. Grudem even admits that there doesn't have to be a one-to-one correspondence, and sometimes multiple Greek words are best translated by a single English word, or even by punctuation. Given that this is the case, no one should insist that every Greek word must have a corresponding English word.

Personal experience has shown that both the ESV and the NIV translators have an extremely high regard for every word of Scripture. The difference is in how they view the relationship between words and meaning. I watched the ESV agonize over how to translate as many of the words as possible in a faithful and meaningful and consistent manner. And I watch as the CBT agonize over how to accurately translate all the meaning conveyed by all the words in a faithful and understandable way.

It is important to state up front that plenary inspiration does not of necessity require every word to be explicitly translated. If no translation explicitly translates every word, if every translation omits thousands of Greek words, then who believes this is an appropriate application of the doctrine of plenary inspiration?

B. Verbal Inspiration

Article VI of the The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy says, "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, *down to the very words of the original*, were given by divine inspiration" (italics mine). It then goes on to say in Article VIII, "We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use *the very words that He chose*, overrode their personalities" (italics mine).

I find myself troubled by this statement, primarily because it claims something that the Bible does not claim for itself, and hence I am under no obligation to accept it, just as many evangelical scholars chose not to sign the Chicago statement. This is not the place to go into a detailed, theological discussion of verbal inspiration, but allow me to share a few things I am currently thinking about.

I don't believe that God inspired the authors with vague, general ideas, which the biblical authors may or may not have accurately expressed in words. I agree with Article III of the Chicago statement that says, "We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity."

We often talk about the theory of "dynamic inspiration." We affirm that God superintended the writing process, but not at the expense of the author's writing style. John wrote as John thought and wrote. Peter wrote as Peter thought and wrote. But God insured that what they wrote was what he wanted said.

This requires an acceptance of mystery, as do many of the beliefs we hold, like the Trinity and the Incarnation. The authors write, and God insures that what they write is not only true but is what he wanted to communicate. But that does not require me to believe that God controlled every word choice that was made. If that were the case, then we must all abandon any sense of mystery and accept the dictation theory of inspiration for all biblical texts.

I have always been comfortable with the concept of mystery.

- It is a mystery that my wife loves me.
- It is a mystery that an airplane can sit in the sky or that flash memory actually works.
- It is a mystery that each individual, elect or not, is responsible for his/her own decisions.
- And it is a mystery how God did not override the authors' personalities and yet insured that what they said was what he wanted said.

But to say that God chose every word, in essense imitating the author's style, removes all mystery and I think we need to be honest and say we believe the Bible was dictated. It does no good to hide behind the cloak of "mystery" if God picks every word.[1]

Think about this. When God inspired Luke to record the parable of the prodigal son, what did he inspire Luke to write in 15:20 about the father? That the father:

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[1] The Koran teaches that God spoke to the angel Gabriel who spoke to Mohammed. Because Mohammed was illiterate, he had to memorize what Gabriel said over nearly three decades. It was Mohammed's followers who wrote the words down, by dictation, word for word. I do not think this is how God inspired the Bible to be written.

- "embraced him" (ESV, NASB), "threw his arms around his neck" (CSB), "hugged his son" (NET),

- or did he inspire Luke to write specifically, "ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ"?

The first option, that God inspired Luke to say that the father hugged his son, makes perfectly good sense to me and does not go beyond what Scripture says about itself. The second option, that God in essence dictated every single word and every single grammatical construction imitating the author's personal writing style, is unnecessary.[1]

It certainly sounds good in an evangelical setting to say that God determined every single Greek and Hebrew word, but it must be acknowledged that Scripture does not say this about itself, and it is significantly beyond the meaning of "carried along by the Holy Spirit" in 2 Peter 1:21.

"Verbal inspiration" means that the Bible is God's revelation in human language. There is an element of mystery how this came to be. The biblical writers got it absolutely right. There is no need to define the doctrine any further.

The implication of all this to our current topic is that if God did not dictate every word to the biblical authors, then it *lessens* the argument that every word must be *explicitly* translated. If God inspired the authors to write in their own style, and superintended the process so that what was written was what he wanted said, then the issue is not the *words* but the *meaning conveyed by the words* that must be conveyed in translation.

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

The second topic I want to address is the nature of language and translation. The point I will be making is that all true translations are meaning-based, not word-based.

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[1] Did God inspire a biblical author to put the adjective in the first or second attributive position? Or did he inspire the author to say "the good man" and allow the author to say it in the manner in which he would say it, with his personality and literary style, all the while making sure the author conveyed the idea that "the man is good"?

But first, I should affirm what we all know: the doctrine of inspiration extends only to the autographs; no translation is inspired. Therefore, my previous thoughts could actually be irrelevant to the question at hand. Even if God did determine every single Greek and Hebrew word, that actually has no necessary bearing on the issue of translation. The Greek is inspired, not the English. Inspiration asserts something about the *source* of the words; translation theory asserts something about communicating the *meaning* of every word.[1]

We all implicitly agree that the purpose of translation is not to merely convey the words from one language to another; otherwise, the only English Bibles that would be for sale in book stores would be interlinears.

As Grudem states, "the purpose of translation is to transfer the *meaning* conveyed by the Greek and Hebrew words, understood in their literary and cultural context, from one cultural context to another." Of course, there is a sliding scale, and some translations are more towards the word side (formal equivalent) and others are more on the meaning side (functional equivalent), but all true translations ultimately translate meaning, not just the words.[2]

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[1] The interesting and somewhat frustrating truth is that this discussion occurs only within the confines of Bible translation. No one translating a modern language would even enter the discussion.

If you wanted to say you were cold in German, you would never say "Ich bin kalt," even though "Ich" means "I" and "bin" means "am" and "kalt" means "cold," unless you want to be laughed at by your friends, as I was, since "Ich bin kalt" means "I am sexually frigid." Only after the laughter died down did I learn that I should have said, "Mir ist kalt," "to me it is cold."

Even in a situation in which you have to be extremely exact in your translation, you would never translate word for word since it would so often miscommunicate. I had a friend who was the vice president of a company that wanted to expand into Europe; McDonalds had asked them to supply all their baked goods. He asked me to help with the German translation so he could understand the contracts he was signing. He did not want some stilted translation; he wanted to know what the contracts meant. Translation is about transferring meaning, not form.

[2] Otherwise, our Bibles would read, "in this way for loved the God the world, so that the son the only gave, in order that each the believing into him might not perish but have life eternal" (οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ᾽ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον).

Our translations would include an English word for every μέν and δέ. Every question introduced with οὐ or μή would have the expected answer expressed in English. Every modifier in the secondary attributive position would have the second article clearly translated. Can you imagine a Bible that translates Mathew 7:3 as, "Why do you see the speck the in the eye of your brother" (Τί δὲ βλέπεις τὸ κάρφος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου)? Every so-called formal equivalent translation is actually a functional equivalent.

B&H Publishers uses the trademark, "Every Word Matters." True. Words are the building blocks of meaning, and every unit of meaning is important, and inspired.

To be sure, at a practical level, formal and functional translations tend to translate word-for-word until going word-for-word makes no sense. Then what do they all do? They all look at the *meaning* of the words and translate *meaning*, so in what real sense is any translation "literal"? And does this not prove that *meaning* is primary, and the form of expressing the meaning is secondary?

The RSV's policy was, "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." In other words, stick with the words until they don't make sense, and then translate what they mean. But does this not prove the point, that meaning is primary to form, and words are translated only when they convey meaning?

Grudem defines an "essentially literal" translation as one that, "*translates the meaning of every word in the original language,* understood correctly in its context, into its nearest English equivalent and attempts to express the result with ordinary English word order and style, as far as that is possible without distorting the meaning of the original."[1] What a great definition of "*functional* equivalence."

Seven Specific Issues

1. Frequency. How often does a formal equivalent translation leave the words and translate meaning? Once a page? Once a paragraph? Once a sentence? Once a phrase? When is any translation "*essentially* literal"? I would challenge anyone to find a single sentence in Greek or Hebrew in any translation that explicitly translates every word and every grammatical construction word-for-word. So, if no translation actually translates word-for-word all the time, then why do the folks in our churches believe they do? Why do marketers imply that they do?

2. Words. The nature of language is such that words have no "literal" meaning. The definitions we teach in first year Greek grammars are merely glosses, approximations of the main

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[1] *Which Bible Translation Should I Use,*" Eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and David A. Croteau (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012) 43–44.

uses of the word in various contexts. So if it is not words but the *meaning of those words* that matters, there is no reason to insist that every word be *explicitly* translated.

Take the issue of Greek word order. Normal Greek order is conjunction, verb, subject, direct object (if the verb is transitive). Greeks wants an initial conjunction to indicate the relationship of a sentence to its preceding context. English doesn't do this; it lets the sequence of sentences carry the thought, indicating minor and major breaks with punctuation and paragraph breaks. In fact, it is incorrect English grammar to begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction.

Is it therefore wrong, for example, to not translate an initial καί or δέ or even γάρ? No, since in essence they are often redundant because of how we hear sequence, and because many are translated by punctuation.[1] And yet the 1984 NIV was often attacked for not translating every γάρ, even those γάρs that merely indicated continuation, which is what a paragraph break can do, or a period in the same paragraph.

It is our responsibility, in our teaching and preaching and writing, to let our people understand this. When someone says, "the Bible says 'flesh,'" we need to help them see that the Bible says "σάρξ,"and σάρξ has many meanings determined by context. I will never forget the time in a translation meeting when an excellent scholar was arguing for his translation. He concluded by pounding his fist on the table and said, "and the Bible says 'brother.'" I concluded my argument to the contrary by pounding my fist on the table (I probably should't have done that) and saying, "and the Bible says 'ἀδελφός.'" I lost the vote, but I was right.

3. Added words. If someone sees verbal inspiration as God dictating every single word, and hence thinks that our role in translation is to explicitly translate every single word, then is it not wrong to add in *new words*, whether you use italics or not?

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[1] Grudem agrees that this does not mean that every Hebrew and Greek word must be translated by a single English word, and even allows punctuation to be an adequate translation of a word. He states, "So 'word for word' does not mean exactly one English word for each Hebrew and Greek word. But it does mean that every word in the original must be translated somehow. The goal in an essentially literal translation is to somehow bring the meaning of every word in the original into the resulting translation in English" (Ibid, 44).

For example, we know that Greek often does not require a direct object when English does. Is it wrong to add in the direct object? What translation doesn't break Eph 1:3–14 into multiple sentences and add in the necessary words? If every word is specifically chosen by God, then is it not wrong to add more words to God's revelation in our translations?[1]

4. Phrases. How do we translate phrases? Do we translate every word in the phrase, or do we translate the meaning of the phrase?

Consider Romans 6:1–2 in the KJV. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid (μὴ γένοιτο)." In a translation that most people feel is word-for-word, this is a wonderfully dynamic translation. Neither the word "God" or the word "forbid" occurs in the Greek, and yet "God forbid" is the strongest negation in the English language and hence does the best job at translating Paul's meaning.

Proper translation looks at all the words in the phrase, and translates the phrase's meaning. No translation translates μὴ γένοιτο as "not it be wished." They say things like "May it never be!" (NASB). "By no means!" (ESV). "Absolutely not!" (CSB). Unfortunately, the anemic translation by the NLT, "Of course not!" uncharacteristically misses the force of the phrase. But the point is, they are all translating meaning, not words.[2]

5. Idioms. Everyone agrees that idioms cannot be translated word-for-word, but in saying that once again we see that everyone agrees that meaning is primary to form.

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[1] If you want to play with statistics, then let's count how many words are in the Bible. The ESV has 757,626. The NASB has 775,853, which makes 18,227 less words in the ESV. The Greek and Hebrew combined have 563,489 words, which means the ESV has 194,137 more words than the original. 34% more words. Something more than simply translating words is going on.

[2] Another example is Eph 2:11 where Paul refers to the "Gentiles in the flesh" (ESV, CSB, ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί). The problem is that this is not translation; it doesn't mean anything. How else would a Gentile be a Gentile?

Collocations also illustrate this point. A single word can have a wide variety of meanings depending on what other word it is joined with. Even if you have some English word for ποιέω, you have to consider the meaning of the two words to create a translation that makes sense. Do you "make adultery" or "commit adultery" (Matt 5:32)? Do you "make the law" or "keep the law" (Jn 7:19)? Do you "make an ambush" or "plan an ambush" (Acts 25:3)? My point is that translation looks at context and translates meaning, not just the words.

I could also ask the question of translating phrases with more or less number of words in the Greek. If the meaning of a four-word Greek phrase is best translated with a three-word English phrase, does it show a lower form of inspiration since it "omits" one of the words? Or to state it in reverse, if a three-word Greek phrase is best translated with a four-word English phrase, am I guilty of adding to Scripture?

The ESV of Acts 20:37 reads, "And there was much weeping on the part of all; they *embraced* Paul and kissed him" (ἐπιπεσόντες ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τοῦ Παύλου). No one would translate that they "threw themselves on Pauls neck," which, according to the footnote in the NASB, is what the text "literally" says. If this is what the text *literally* says, then why is the *literal* translation in the footnote?[1]

(By the way, can we please pressure publishers to stop putting the word "literally" in footnotes? If that is what the Greek "literally" says, and if the Bible claims to be a "literal" or "essentially literal" translation," then those footnotes should be in the text. But since those footnotes rarely make any sense, can we pressure publishers to be honest and put something like "Greek, threw themselves on Paul's neck" in the footnote? I wouldn't hold my breath.)

6. Metaphors. The challenge of metaphors is whether they are understandable in the target language, whether in the language's active or passive vocabulary. Is the metaphor alive or dead? If they are not understandable, then the metaphor must be interpreted. After all, the purpose of translation is to convey the message of God to a sick and dying world. What good would it do to repeat a meaningless metaphor?

I am a little old fashioned at this point; apparently I heard words like a much older person does. "Behold" makes good sense to me. Translating περιπατέω as "walk" and not "live" is my preference. And when Jesus says we are to μένω in him (John 15:4), there is no more accurate translation than to "abide in me" rather than the anemic "remain in me."

However, the real question is whether or not the metaphor is understandable, and in my experience there is a wide range of opinion as to whether a certain metaphor is alive or dead.

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[1] I was able to speak in China few years ago on the Sermon on the Mount. At one point I said that Jesus does not let us "straddle the fence." I stopped and asked the translator what she had said in Chinese since I could not remember seeing any fences in China (except around building projects). She laughed and said, "foot in two boat." The only way to translate the phrase "straddle the fence" was to use four words, none of which corresponded to the words I had used, and yet it was a near-perfect translation.

In order to say that God is patient, Hebrew says that he has a "long nose," brought into the KJV with the phrase "long suffering." But the Hebrew author never meant to convey the idea that God has a protruding proboscis. It is an idiom, which means that the meanings of the individual words do not add up to the meaning of the phrase. In other words, it would be misleading to translate just the words; we have to translate the meaning conveyed by the words.

In 2 John 12, the ESV reads, "Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk *face to face*, so that our joy may be complete." "Face to face" is a dynamic translation of the Greek, στόμα πρὸς στόμα, "mouth to mouth," but that metaphor would not be understandable in our culture.

What about the account of the evangelism happening in Antioch, and "the news about them *reached the ears* of the church at Jerusalem" (NASB, Acts 11:22). The ESV says, "the report of this *came to the ears* of the church in Jerusalem." When the NIV translates, "news of this *reached* the church in Jerusalem," are they dropping out the word "ear"? Of course not, no more than the NASB can be faulted for translating ἠκούσθη as "reached" and the ESV for using "came," two English words that you would never find in BDAG's definitions of ἀκούω. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem *heard* about God's activity in Antioch. That's what the Greek means. That's what God inspired. Greek uses one set of words to convey this meaning, and translations use another set of words to convey the same meaning.

It is at this point I must seriously disagree with Grudem. In his chapter in the book *Translating Truth*, he has a section on the "missing words" in dynamic translations.[1] While his critique is primarily on what I call "natural language" translations, his conclusion is that the NIV is unreliable. Why would Grudem critique the NLT and then draw a conclusion about the NIV? Why would he critique the TNIV and state his conclusion about the NIV?[2]

He lists nine "missing words," like God bearing the "sword," and the "wrath" of God. However, in only one of the nine does the TNIV not keep the metaphor ("by his hands"). The CBT apparently thought the metaphor was dead; Grudem thinks it is alive. However, in three of the nine examples of missing words, Grudem acknowledges that the TNIV keeps the "mis-

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[1] Grudem, Only *Some* Words op. cit., 30 – 45.

[2] The second edition of the NIV was published in 1984. Its update was named the TNIV (*Today's New International Version*) and was published in 2005. The TNIV has since been updated to the current NIV, published in 2011. *Translating Truth* was published in 2005.

sing words," and five times the TNIV keeps the "missing words" and *yet he does not even acknowledge that fact.* So the TNIV keeps eight of Grudem's nine missing words.

It is wholly inappropriate to critique natural language translations, to not acknowledge the facts of the NIV and its significant difference from natural language translations, and then draw a negative conclusion about the NIV. I must say that I was disappointed in Grudem's conclusion, that "although the NIV is not a thoroughly dynamic translation, there is so much dynamic equivalence influence in the NIV that I cannot teach theology or ethics from it either."[1] What is disappointing is his misuse of the data. Five out of the nine times he does not even admit that the TNIV keeps the metaphors, and the TNIV keeps eight out of the nine "missing words."

When it comes to metaphors, every translation committee must decide whether the metaphor is alive or dead. It is an exegetical judgment; it is not an issue of one's view of inspiration. Grudem is confusing hermeneutics with translation theory.

7. Syntactic Correspondence. It is often said that translations should honor the syntax of the Greek. (Good luck doing that with Hebrew.) If God inspired the author to use a participle, then we should use a participle. If God inspired a prepositional phrase, we should not turn it into a relative clause. The problem of course is that in reality not a single translation does this. Every single one abandons syntactic correspondence when necessary to convey meaning.

We see this for example when syntax is changed to complete an anacoluthon such as 1 Tim 1:3. Both the NASB and the ESV change the participle προσμεῖναι to an imperative. "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, *remain on* at Ephesus."[2] It is also seen when

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[1] Grudem, "Only *Some* Words" op. cit, 49.

[2] A common Greek construction is to have an aorist adverbial participle followed by an indicative verb. This is one way in which the Greeks indicate sequence. The first-year Greek student, in order to show that they understand it is an aorist, will most likely have to distinguish the participle from the indicative as well as include "after" to show that it is adverbial. Matthew 2:3 would read, "King Herod, after hearing, was troubled." This translation distinguishes the two verbal forms but at the expense of English style.

In English, we handle sequence differently. If we hear A, and B, and C, we tend to hear them in sequence. A happened, then B, then C. Greek doesn't, so it needs an indicator that one action happened first and then the second. This is a common function of the aorist participle. So how do we translate it with proper English style?

Greek stylistically writes long sentences in its hypotactic style, and English must shorten the sentences and write in its paratactic style.[1] Syntax must be changed.

I favor syntactic correspondence when it accurately conveys meaning. I especially want to know when a verbal form is dependent or independent. But the point of translation is meaning, and sometimes meaning is best conveyed with different parts of speech.

8. Context. Finally, the fact that literary and cultural context is so important in determining meaning should caution us from placing an undo focus on individual words.

Suppose the year is 2418, and you are an African archaeologist supervising a dig in what is now called "Tell New York." You come across a scrap of paper with the words, "You dirty rat." How would you translate it? It's not the individual words that would matter as much as its *cultural* context.

- If the parchment came from a truck with equipment to kill rodents, you would think the driver found a rat that was dirty.

- If it was from a movie script about Al Capone, you would realize that someone was about to be killed.

- If it is a note between two friends playing cards, you would realize that it is actually an expression of endearment, expressing the loser's frustration at losing to a friend.

When I speak to university students, I like to gauge their literary sensitivities with two words. If I say "plethora," some of the older faculty laugh and the students stare with blank expressions, because they are unaware of that great cinematic achievement, "The Three Amigos." "A plethora of pinatas." But if I say that something is "inconceivable," the roles are rev-

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We say, "King Herod heard and was troubled." We turn the participle ("hearing") into an indicative ("heard") because that is what English style requires to indicate sequence. If we do not do this, we produce poor English, which suggests to the average reader that Luke was not an accomplished writer, which of course we know is not true.

Another example of difference in style is how Greek and English handle a series of items. Greek tends to use conjunctions more than we do, so it says A and B and C and D. This is poor English style; we say A, B, C, and D. The first may reflect Greek structure but is poor English. The latter reflects how we speak and write.

[1] See Carson, "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 72.

ersed, the students are surprised that I am familiar with the cult classic "The Princes Bride," and the faculty scratch their head in bewilderment.

Words have meaning only in context, sometimes a literary context and other times a cultural context. All translators agree that context is essential for faithful translation, and all recognize that our knowledge of cultural context is limited, extremely limited in the case of Hebrew. But my argument is that it is not just words that we should be translating, but the meaning of the words informed by their context, both literary and cultural. This is functional equivalence.

CONCLUSION

Before I conclude, I want to add in one note. I have been speaking today as if a word and its meaning are somehow separated. I know that is not the case. Words and their meanings are tied together in a complicated mesh. But I have been speaking this way in order to drive the point home, that all translations are, to one degree or another, meaning-based.

It is not appropriate for any translation to say it is "literal" or "essentially literal." There is no such thing as a "literal" translation. No word has a "literal" meaning. There is not a single verse in any Bible that goes word-for-word, not a single translation that translates every single Greek word with an English word. If you translate eight out of ten Greek words, why would someone think that they have a higher view of inspiration than the person who translates seven out of ten? Given the significant freedom each and every translation exercises with the Greek and especially the Hebrew, should not we all admit that we translate thought-for-thought, trying as hard as we can to communicate *every single piece of meaning* possible, and if possible replicating the form of the original?

Plenary inspiration requires us to believe that every piece of meaning conveyed by all the words of Scripture is true. Verbal inspiration requires us to believe that the words used by the human authors accurately reflect the mind of God. Therefore, if I wanted to be argumentative, I would argue that translations focused on *meaning* show a higher view of inspiration

because they are not content to use words that are vague or confusing or unnecessarily ambiguous. They work harder to convey the inspired meaning given to the authors by God.

But every translator I know, which is many of them, has an extremely high view of Scripture, and is doing his or her best to accurately convey all the meaning of the original text. I would never confuse translation theory with a high or low view of inspiration.