Principles of Effective Bible Translation:
Advantages of an "Essentially Literal" Translation Philosophy
(or, Why Plenary Inspiration Favors "Essentially Literal" Translations)

Bible translations represent different philosophies of translation along a spectrum from "essentially literal" to "dynamic equivalent." What exactly is an essentially literal translation, and what are its advantages? What principles should guide translators of the Bible? What difficulties face Bible translators? This workshop will include references to several modern English translations, but the principles should apply to translation into any language. (Wayne Grudem is a member of the Translation Oversight Committee for the English Standard Version, and a 4-minute film clip of the ESV committee in session will be part of this workshop.)

Wayne Grudem is Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary in Arizona. He previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for 20 years. He has served as the president of the Evangelical Theological Society (1999), as a member of the Translation Oversight Committee for the English Standard Version of the Bible, and was the General Editor for the ESV Study Bible (2008). He has written more than 100 articles for both popular and academic journals, and 17 books, including *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, *The First Epistle of Peter*, and *Business for the Glory of God*. He has also edited *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*.

I. Argument from Scripture

    A. Various passages of Scripture indicate that *all* of the Bible (in the autographs) is to be considered the Word of God. (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21)
    B. This finds reflection in the ETS statement of faith, "the Bible *in its entirety* is the Word of God written ..."
    C. But does "all Scripture" mean the individual words themselves?
        1. In fact, several texts of Scripture place emphasis exactly on the individual words themselves Prov 30:5; Ps 12:6; Matt 4:4; Rev 22:18)
        2. Sometimes Jesus & NT authors - arguments depend on a single word (Matt 22:42; 5:18; Gal 3:16)

II. The importance of all the words of God means that translators should translate no less than the original and no more than the original

    A. What does each word contribute to the meaning?
        1. If all the words of Scripture are from God, then it is important to focus on accurately translating the meaning of each word.
            a. Translators should not only ask, "Have I rendered the main idea of this sentence correctly?" but also, "Have I represented correctly the meaning that each word contributes to this sentence?"
        2. That is the philosophy that is behind essentially literal translations (such as ESV)
        Also: KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV(with some exceptions especially in gender-neutral language), NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB

    B. "Dynamic equivalence" (or "functional equivalence") translations by virtue of their translation theory often fail to translate the meaning that some words contribute to the sentence. (examples below)
<div align="center">A spectrum of translations</div>
Very literal - Very paraphrastic

KEEP HEBREW & GREEK WORD ORDER	ESSENTIALLY LITERAL –> TRANSLATE THE WORDS	MIXED	DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE –>TRANSLATE THE MAIN IDEAS
Interlinear	KJV NKJV NASB RSV NRSV ESV NET HCSB	NIV NIVI TNIV	NLT CEV MSG

C. Examples of leaving out the meaning of some words

1. The missing sword: Rom 13:4

ESV Romans 13:4 he does not bear the sword (th.n ma,cairan forei) in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrong doer.

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: sword (all "essentially literal" translations)

NLT Romans 13:4 The authorities are sent by God to help you. But if you are doing something wrong, of course you should be afraid, for you will be punished. The authorities are established by God for that very purpose, to punish those who do wrong.

NCV Romans 13:4 The ruler is God's servant to help you. But if you do wrong, then be afraid. He has the power to punish; he is God's servant to punish those who do wrong.

–> was the word *machairos* breathed out by God? then why not translate it?

–> important in capital punishment debate

–> Are only *some* words of Scripture breathed out by God?

2. Removing the wrath of God (Rom 13:4)

ESV Romans 13:4 But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath (e;kdikoj eivj ovrgh.n) on the wrongdoer.

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, ESV, HCSB: "wrath" (NET omits: "to administer retribution")

NLT Romans 13:4 But if you are doing something wrong, of course you should be afraid, for you will be punished. The authorities are established by God for that very purpose, to punish those who do wrong.

NCV Romans 13:4 But if you do wrong, then be afraid. He has the power to punish; he is God's servant to punish those who do wrong.

Why important? (1) Ties back to Rom 12:19 (wrath). (2) Shows retributive function for government.

–> Why missing from DE translations? Is not *orge* a word that is breathed out by God?

3. The missing hands

ESV Mark 6:2 How are such mighty works done <u>by his hands</u>? dia. tw/n ceirw/n auvtou/

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: hands

NIV Mark 6:2 "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that <u>he</u> even does miracles!"

NLT Mark 6:2 "Where did <u>he</u> get all his wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?

Similarly, "hands" are missing from Acts 5:12; 14:3; 19:11 in NIV, NLT

4. The lost soul

ESV John 12:27 "Now is my <u>soul</u> (*psychē mou*) troubled.

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: soul

NIV John 12:27 "Now my <u>heart</u> is troubled ...

NCV John 12:27 Now <u>I</u> am very troubled.

Message: John 12:27: Right now <u>I</u> am storm-tossed.

5. The lost spirit

ESV John 13:21 After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his <u>spirit</u> ... tw/| pneu,mati

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: "spirit" (also NLT)

NCV John 13:21 After Jesus said this, <u>he</u> was very troubled.

Message: John 13:21 After he said these things, <u>Jesus</u> became visibly upset ...

Another example: Luke 1:46 KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: "soul ... spirit"

NLT Luke 1:46 Mary responded, "Oh, how <u>I</u> praise the Lord. [47] How I rejoice in God my Savior!

NCV Luke 1:46 Then Mary said, "My soul praises the Lord; my <u>heart</u> rejoices in God my Savior

Msg: Luke 1:46 And Mary said, <u>I'm</u> bursting with God-news; <u>I'm</u> dancing the song of my Savior God.

6. The disappearing rod of discipline

ESV Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the <u>rod</u> (Ajb.v) hates his son

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: rod

NLT Proverbs 13:24 If you refuse to <u>discipline</u> your children, it proves you don't love them; if

you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them.

Similar case: Prov 22:15

7. The lost faces

ESV 1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then <u>face to face</u>. (pro,swpon pro.j pro,swpon). KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: "face to face"

NLT 1 Corinthians 13:12 Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see <u>everything with perfect clarity</u>.

NCV 1 Corinthians 13:12 It is the same with us. Now we see a dim reflection as if we were looking into a mirror, but then we shall see clearly.

8. The stolen kiss

ESV Romans 16:16 Greet one another with a <u>holy kiss</u>. (evn filh,mati a`gi,w|Å)

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: "holy kiss"

NLT Romans 16:16 Greet each other in <u>Christian love</u>.

9. The missing heart and the absent Holy Spirit

ESV Psalm 51:10-11
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Message: Psalm 51:10-11
God make a fresh start in me,
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.
Don't throw me out with the trash,
or fail to breathe holiness in me.

10. The lost name of God

ESV John 17:26 I made known to them your name (to. o;noma, sou), and I will continue to make it known

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: "your name" ("thy name" in KJV, RSV)

NIV John 17:26 I have made <u>you</u> known to them, and will continue to make you known

NLT John 17:26 And I have revealed <u>you</u> to them and will keep on revealing you.

11. Overriding the meaning of "therefore" (*oun*):

ESV John 11:5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. [6] So (ou=n) , when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

NKJV, RSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: So (KJV: therefore; NRSV: accordingly, though (??))

Dynamic equivalence translations

NIV John 11:5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. [6] <u>Yet</u> when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

NLT John 11:5 <u>Although</u> Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, [6] he stayed where he was for the next two days and did not go to them.

D. Examples of <u>adding words that have no basis in the original Hebrew or Greek</u>

When dynamic equivalence translations attempt only to render the main idea of a phrase or verse, they often add components of meaning that are not in the original text. English Bible readers will then think something is in Scripture that is not.

1. Added needs

ESV 1 Timothy 6:17 nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with <u>everything</u> (pa,nta) to enjoy .

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB: everything/ all things

NLT 1 Timothy 6:17 their trust ... in the living God, who richly gives us <u>all we need</u> for our enjoyment.

2. Added elders

ESV 1 Timothy 5:22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands (cei/raj tace,wj mhdeni. evpiti,qei)

KJV, NKJV, RSV, NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB; also NCV: laying on of hands (or similar)

NLT 1 Timothy 5:22 Never be in a hurry about appointing an elder.

NRS 1 Timothy 5:22 Do not ordain anyone hastily,

3. Teachers who can never get anything right

ESV James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. [2] For we all stumble in many ways polla. ga.r ptai,omen a[pantejÅ

Message: James 3:2 And none of us is perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths.

4. Boasting about being wise as "the worst kind of lie"

ESV James 3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. mh. katakauca/sqe kai. yeu,desqe kata. th/j avlhqei,ajÅ

NLT James 3:14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie.

5. "At all times" added for good measure

ESV James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle (evpieikh,j( ), open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

NLT James 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds ...

6. A whole new army of evil desires invading Christians

ESV James 4:1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ouvk evnteu/qen(evk tw/n h`donw/n u`mw/n tw/n strateuome,nwn evn toi/j me,lesin u`mw/nÈ

NLT James 4:1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you?

III. The theory of dynamic equivalence is the culprit behind these missing and added words

  Some comments on Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Brill, 2003; first published UBS, 1969)

A. The theory of dynamic equivalence was primarily promoted by Eugene Nida:

  "Correctness [of a translation] must be determined by the extent to which the average reader for which a translation is intended will be likely to understand it correctly. Moreover, we are   not concerned merely with the possibility of his understanding correctly, but with the   overwhelming likelihood of it." (Eugene Nida & Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of   Translation* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003; first pub. 1969), p. 1).

  "Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the   receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same   manner as the receptors in the source language." (Ibid., p. 24.)

B. Assessment of Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence: benefits

  1. Nida has made a significant contribution to the translation of the Bible into hundreds of   obscure languages

  2. His writings provided a helpful correction to the overly literal emphasis of ASV (1901)

    - ASV often copied the word order of   original languages

      → difficult word order in English

      → awkward, unnatural English

C. But there are serious objections to dynamic equivalence as a theory
    1. Nida explains his translation theory by citing his UCLA linguistics professors, not by discussing <u>what the Bible says</u> about its own words (quoted in Grudem, *Translating Truth*, p. 51)

    2. Nida's final standard of good translation is <u>easy understandability to an "average reader"</u> (non-Christian). While we should not neglect understandability, our final standard should rather be <u>faithfulness to the original text</u>.

    → Some parts of the Bible were not easy to understand even for original readers, and many parts were not written to non-Christians but to Christians. (see *Translating Truth*, p. 54)

D. It is not clear from Nida's book if he thinks that the words of the original Hebrew and Greek text are God's very words
    "Greek and Hebrew are just "languages," with all the excellencies and liabilities that every language tends to have. They are neither the languages of heaven nor the speech of the Holy Spirit." (Eugene Nida & Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003; first pub. 1969). p. 6.

E. Conclusion:
A belief that all the words of Scripture are the very words of God leads me to encourage and support essentially literal translations over dynamic equivalence translations.

F. Definitions:
Essentially Literal: An essentially literal translation <u>translates the meaning of every word in the original language, understood correctly in its context, into its nearest English equivalent,</u> 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.

Sometimes such a translation is also called a "word for word" translation, which is fine if we understand that at times one word in the original may be translated accurately by two or more words in English, and sometimes two or more words in the original can be represented by one word in English. The main point is that essentially literal translations <u>attempt to represent *the meaning of every word* in the original in some way or other in the resulting translation</u>

Dynamic Equivalence: A dynamic equivalence translation <u>translates the thoughts or ideas of the original text into similar thoughts or ideas in English</u>, and "attempts to have the same impact on modern readers as the original had on its own audience." (Introduction to NLT).