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The Paradigm Shift in Bible Translation  
in the Modern Era,  
With Special Focus on Thai

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Translation Studies,  
The University of Auckland, 2007.

## Abstract

In the last two decades there has been a significant shift in Bible translation, away from the approach developed by Eugene A. Nida of the United Bible Societies. The practice of Bible translation in the modern era was greatly influenced by Nida, and still is to a great extent. His ‘functional equivalence’ approach to translation gave priority to communicating the meaning of the text instead of merely retaining the form. His approach also included testing the translation to ensure that average readers understood the meaning.

Nida’s approach was expanded upon by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) into what is known as the ‘meaning-based’ approach. The difference between it and the functional equivalence approach is mainly one of degree, with the meaning-based approach being freer in several respects than Nida’s approach.

However, there has been a movement away from Nida (as well as SIL’s meaning-based approach) among many Bible translators. The reasons for this shift are varied, although one major influence has been the growing awareness that the language communities who are the recipients of these translations should have a major part in deciding what kind of translation will be prepared. Such communities often prefer more literal translations. Yet they are seldom given the background information they need to make an informed decision about what approach is appropriate for them, partly because no studies exist which document the objective evaluation and comparison of different approaches to translation of the Bible. This thesis documents actual testing of three types of translation in the Thai language to determine which one most clearly communicates the meaning of the Bible. It was found that the meaning-based translation communicated most clearly for some stories that were tested, the functional equivalence translation achieved the second best results, and a semi-literal translation had the most significant communication problems. The findings also provide dramatic evidence about the *limits* any translation of the Bible has for people who have never heard its message before.

This thesis also describes a new kind of testing of translation quality which the author developed in order to objectively compare different translations in Thai. Subjects were asked to read translated passages and then take a written multiple-choice

test about the meaning of the translation. This new kind of testing has several advantages over the kind of testing in general use by most Bible translators.

## Dedication

This study is dedicated to Dr. Robert G. Bratcher, translator of the *Good News Bible*.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the following people for their help in doing this research and writing this thesis, in alphabetical order: Frank Austermuehl, James Bade, Ann Cates, Larry Cates, Rob Collins, Art Cooper, Pam Cooper, Margie Doty, Dick Elkins, Sabine Fenton, Terry Gibbs, Ernst-August Gutt, Bill Hanna, Ralph Hill, Dick Hohulin, Lou Hohulin, Kristen Herr, Ramzi Nahhas, Duangthip Nakheeree, Christiane Nord, Luke Oliver, Wyn Owen, Stephen Pattemore, Wannapa Reongjareonsook, Sandra Schneiders, Gam Shae, Fred Shannon, Aree Srikam, Amporn Sukcomfong, Sittichoke Sukramull, Prang Thiengburanathum, Barbara Thomas, Carole Unseth, and Elaine Wainwright.

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