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Katelyn R. Fisher
Cedarville University, katelynfisher@cedarville.edu

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What Did God *Say*?

A Critical Analysis of Dynamic Equivalence Theory

Katelyn R. Fisher

Cedarville University

Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of Eugene A. Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence as it relates

to Bible translation, largely through a comparative study of select passages from the biblical

genres of poetry, proverbs, and Pauline epistles. In addition, a brief survey distributed to 72

students at Cedarville University provides both qualitative and quantitative data regarding which

English Bible version they prefer and why. Identifying Nida's contributions to translation

studies and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of his theory in practice serves to provide

implications for believers who are seeking to discern which English version is the most accurate,

natural, and clear. This study asserts that dynamic equivalence should take precedence over a

more literal, word-for-word approach when translating Scripture because it is more useful in

communicating the message of Scripture.

Keywords: dynamic equivalence, formal correspondence

A Critical Analysis of Dynamic Equivalence Theory

As the inerrant, infallible, and inspired Word of God, the Bible has stood the test of the time. Since the ascension of Christ and the spread of copies of Scripture to the early churches, the translation movement progressed slowly at irregular intervals until the last two centuries. According to Wycliffe Global Alliance (2017), at least partial Scripture exists in nearly 3,300 languages. An estimated 46% of the world's population can hold a portion of the Bible in their hands. Fundamental to understanding the accessibility of the Bible in any context, however, is the concept of communication (Smalley, 1991). According to Smalley (1991), since language is a complicated form of human communication, "translation multiplies the complexity by the degree to which two or more languages differ in grammar, meaning structures, styles and conventions of use" (p. 7). Therefore, the aim of this study is to demonstrate that a more dynamic approach to Bible translation is more useful in communicating the message of Scripture, by clearly defining Eugene A. Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence, conducting a comparative study among the biblical genres of poetry, proverbs, and the Pauline epistles, offering a sociolinguistic perspective to general preferences among a group of college students, and providing implications for believers who desire to read Scripture and truly understand what God has to say.

Literature Review

From strictly the perspective of comparative linguistics, translation can be defined as "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" (Catford, 1965, p. 20). Catford's broad, yet accurate, definition makes use of the abbreviations: SL = Source Language, TL = Target Language. The danger of approaching

translation solely from this perspective is the tendency to mechanically apply a series of rules

without regard to the two basic elements of context and literary level (Nida, 1969, p. 483). Nida

proceeds with the following:

> A careful analysis of exactly what goes on in the process of translating, especially in the
>
> case of source and receptor languages having quite different grammatical and semantic
>
> structures, has shown that, instead of going directly from one set of surface structures to
>
> another, the competent translator actually goes through a seemingly roundabout process
>
> of analysis, transfer, and restructuring. (p. 484)

Therefore, Nida and Taber (2003) contend that "translating consists in reproducing in the

receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of

meaning and secondly in terms of style" (p. 12). It was not until the mid-twentieth century that

translation theories, specifically regarding the Bible, began to develop, and in contrast to the

unsystematic and loose folk theories previously used (Smalley, 1991). Translation studies, then,

rose as a sophisticated discipline with its own unique schools of thought, one of which is

dynamic equivalence theory.

Dynamic Equivalence Theory

As previously mentioned, linguist Eugene A. Nida pioneered a theoretical approach to

translation studies that was more structured than previous approaches, which resulted in the

formation of dynamic equivalence theory. Scholars and translators alike began coining

alternative terms, and they began applying dynamic equivalence very broadly, stepping beyond

the methodology Nida had created (Kerr, 2011). Eventually, according to Kerr (2011), Nida

himself rejected the term "dynamic equivalence," so for consistency within this study and to

accurately trace the formation, applications, and implications of the theory, "dynamic equivalence" will suffice. According to Nida and Taber (2003), dynamic equivalence is defined as the "quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the *response* of the *receptor* is essentially like that of the original receptors" (p. 200). This kind of translation involves taking each thought from the original text and rendering it into a thought in the receptor language that conveys the same meaning, but may not use the exact form, or structure, of the original (Shakernia, 2013). Nida believed strongly that "reproducing the message" ought to be the primary aim of the translator, but that he must also be careful to make appropriate and accurate adjustments with regards to grammar and vocabulary (Nida & Taber, 2003).

Four fundamental principles. To accomplish such a task, Nida and Taber (2003) established four fundamental priorities to ensure dynamic equivalence: 1) contextual consistency over verbal consistency, 2) dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence, 3) the aural form over the written form, and 4) forms that are used by the intended audience over more prestigious forms. The first priority acknowledges that translating a word in the source language using a corresponding word in the receptor language may not be the clearest rendering of the passage because semantic areas of corresponding words in different languages are not necessarily identical. Secondly, prioritizing dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence requires that the response of the receptor should be as close as possible to the response of the original receptors (Smalley, 1991). Nida's third priority is the aural, or heard, form over the written form, especially when translating the Bible because it is often used for liturgical purposes and is used for oral instruction around the world (Nida & Taber, 2003). To assume that an excellent

written form is equally as excellent when read aloud is simply incorrect. The fourth and final

priority states that the forms easily understood by the target audience take precedence over more

linguistically prestigious or previously accepted forms. This is a question of style, which is the

topic of great debate regarding languages with longstanding literary or liturgical traditions.

      Analysis, transfer, and restructuring. According to Kerr (2011), Nida's greatest

contribution to translation studies entailed his abilities to compile, consolidate, and adapt

formerly proven linguistic theories to construct a complete working theory to aid in the process

of translation. Dynamic equivalence is Nida's great composition, which is guided by the four

aforementioned principles, consists of three stages: 1) analysis, in which grammatical and

semantic relationships are analyzed at the simplest level, 2) transfer, in which the analyzed

material is transferred from the source language to the receptor language, and 3) restructuring, in

which the transferred material is restructured into a grammatically and semantically clear and

concise message in the receptor language (Nida & Taber, 2003).

Figure 1. Analysis, transfer, and restructuring. (Nida & Taber, 2003, p. 33)

Figure 1 diagrams this approach, from source through analysis, transfer, and restructuring to

receptor. A discussion of analysis would be incomplete without briefly mentioning the concept

of kernel structures; that is, "the basic structural elements out of which the language builds its

elaborate surface structures" (Nida & Taber, 2003, p. 39). Essentially, with the aid of insights

from Noam Chomsky's theory on transformational grammar, which reveals that all languages

share a few basic structures out of which more elaborate structures are constructed, Nida and

Taber (2003) conclude that the translator can produce a more accurate transfer (p. 39). Nida

(1969) insists, however, that the translator must be careful to relate these kernel, or core,

structures meaningfully, not just string them together as a basis for transfer. Grammar has

meaning, and analysis is the process by which the simplest levels of grammatical and semantic

relationships are assessed.

The second stage of this approach is transfer, which occurs in the brain of the translator

(Nida & Taber, 2003). Smalley (1991) states that analysis is the process of fully understanding

the source text, while transfer is the process of understanding the source text from the

perspective of the receptor language. At the stage of transfer, the translator comes with a set of

"largely unconscious predispositions" (p. 99) which can cloud judgment and impair

effectiveness, so Nida and Taber (2003) present the potential personal and semantic problems

that may occur in transfer. Regarding translation of the Bible, transfer is especially important

because there are layers of meaning within the context of biblical passages that may not be

immediately understood by the target audiences from different cultures. The translator must step

outside of the source text to see it through the lens of the receptor language.

Restructuring is the final stage of Nida's three-step process of dynamic equivalence, and

it is at this point that the meaning drawn from the source text is written in a style which is

natural, appropriate, and clear for the target audience (Smalley, 1991). Three considerations

when restructuring a message from the source language to the receptor language, according to

Nida and Taber (2003), include the varieties of language styles available, the essential

characteristics of those styles, and the techniques necessary to produce the desired style. At this point in the process, the translator must pay careful attention to style, literary genre, and impact within the receptor language (Nida, 1969).

By means of this concise, yet complex, three-step approach to translation, the translator can properly and thoroughly regard the receptor language by decoding the message from the source language and encoding it into an appropriate equivalent (Nida, 1969). However, Smalley (1991) acknowledges that a perfect dynamic equivalence translation does not exist, but rather "a constant search by analysis, transfer, and restructuring, to reach maximum accessibility and minimum distortion" (p. 121). Testing the translation upon completion of these processes is necessary to uncover possible problems, which include, but are not limited to, lacks of accuracy, intelligibility, and stylistic equivalence (Nida & Taber, 2003). In summary, according to Nida's theoretical approach, which was fully published in 1965 in his initial work titled *Toward a Science of Translating:*

> A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message. (as cited in Kerr, 2011, p. 1)

Formal Correspondence

To compare and contrast the details of every theory under the umbrella of translation studies would require a much more in-depth study, but it is important to note one of the most notorious contrasting perspectives. Nida, although a proponent of dynamic equivalence, also coined the term "formal correspondence," and the two translation approaches are dissimilar.

Shakernia (2013) states that a translation done by means of formal correspondence "tries to remain as close to the original text as possible, without adding the translator's ideas and thoughts" (p. 2). It is a more literal rendering of the text because it remains as close to the original as possible in both form and content (Bassnett, 1980). Further, Bassnett (1980) notes that Nida calls this type of translation a "gloss translation" (p. 26) because it enables the target audience to understand as much of the source language as possible..

Figure 2 diagrams this approach, which can be illustrated as a more linear process because "the features of the form of the source text are mechanically reproduced in the receptor language" (Nida & Taber, 2003, p. 201). "A" represents the source language, "B" represents the receptor language, and "(X)" represents any kind of universal structure to which any language might be related to undergo transfer.
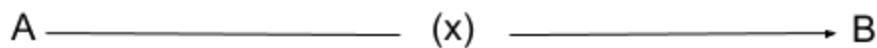
$$A \text{———————} (x) \text{———————→} B$$

Figure 2. Formal correspondence. (Nida & Taber, 2003, p. 33)

Strengths and Weaknesses of Dynamic Equivalence

Both sides of the spectrum of translation theories have substantial evidential support. Translation, by its very nature, according to Eyl (2014), is inexact and misses the mark, and the success of a translation is measured by its degrees of proximity to that mark. A brief synopsis of some of the major strengths and weakness of dynamic equivalence, particularly in contrast with formal correspondence, will suffice moving forward into a comparative study and an overall analysis.

Proponents of formal correspondence argue that it is more accurate because this approach remains true to corresponding linguistic forms between the source language and the receptor

language. However, Nida and Taber (2003) contend that, "if accuracy is judged by the response of the receptors, then this assumes that dynamic equivalence is more accurate" (p. 28). As previously discussed, dynamic equivalence seeks to mirror the response and impact of the original as closely as possible, whereas formal correspondence prioritizes the consistent matching of linguistic units between the source text and the receptor language on one or more levels. The priority of dynamic equivalence is readability, but formal correspondence emphasizes the ability to understand as much of the "customs, manners of thought, and means of expression" of the source language context by preserving the original wording as much as possible (Shakernia, 2013, p. 2). Neufeld (2008) argues that dynamic equivalence could not possibly accomplish the goal of complete receptor understanding like that of the original audience because "to understand the original requires understanding the social system its language encodes" (p. 13). Ultimately, Smalley (1991) identifies that formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence differ in their goals, purposes, and degrees of distortion. Nida and Taber (2003) introduce their work by acknowledging that correctness of a translation directly corresponds with comprehensibility, which is subjective from context to context. Therefore, different levels of translation are necessary for all peoples to have equal access to the message.

Method

To analyze dynamic equivalence theory and to demonstrate that this approach to Bible translation is more useful in understanding the text, passages were selected and compared from three genres found in Scripture, namely poetry, proverbs, and Pauline epistles. Exclusively comparing the more literal New American Standard Bible (NASB) with the more dynamic Good News Translation (GNT) was sufficient to illustrate some of the major differences and

difficulties. For the sake of remaining focused within this study, the full history of these

translations has not been explained and the depths of the theoretical frameworks which inspired

the translators' choices have not been discussed. However, these two particular English

translations were selected because they notoriously represent the extreme perspectives, and

Figure 3 provides a table of comparison.

Version	Date	Translation Philosophy	Manuscripts Used
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	1971; updated 1995	Word-for-word, formal correspondence	*Biblia Hebraica*, Nestle's Greek Text, 23rd edition (1971); *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Nestle-Aland/UBS 26th edition (1995)
Good News Translation (GNT), formerly Today's English Version (TEV) and Good News Bible (GNB)	1976	Thought-for-thought, dynamic equivalence	*Biblia Hebraica* (3rd edition), UBS Greek NT (3rd edition)

Figure 3. Comparison chart of NASB and GNT.

In addition, volumes II, III, and IV of *The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible* by J.

P. Green, published in 1985, aided the study. These texts enabled the identification of the

nuances and layers of meaning that lie within the original biblical languages. Because these

interlinear biblical texts are keyed with Strong's concordance and equipped with a column

containing the literal renderings of each passage, it was possible to have full access to the

information necessary to conduct this study despite my limited knowledge of Hebrew and Greek.

Using the *Westminster Leningrad Codex*, which is the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew

Bible, and the *Morphological Greek New Testament* as provided by Blue Letter Bible, I constructed tables that serve as visual comparisons of the original biblical text, the New American Standard Bible, and the Good News Translation.

For the comparative study, I elected to examine accuracy and ambiguity in Psalm 23:1 from the genre of biblical poetry. From proverbial literature, I analyzed the Hebrew idiom רַע עַיִן ("evil eye") in Proverbs 28:22. Despite the array of acceptable options from Paul's epistles, I chose to explore the semantic intention behind his use of the optative mood in μὴ γένοιτο ("may it not be") in Romans 6:2. Rather than analyze examples that emerge from Nida's four fundamental principles, I opted to study three phrases that were commonly controversial and more easily misunderstood in order to better support my research.

To collect data regarding a sociolinguistic perspective, I distributed surveys (see Appendix A) to 72 students at Cedarville University. Every student fell between the ages of 18 and 23 and 87.5% of the participants affiliated with either a Baptist or non-denominational church, which provided a relatively controlled demographic. The survey produced both qualitative and quantitative data that expressed which English Bible version the students preferred and why, as well as which translation of Psalm 23:1, Proverbs 28:22, and Romans 6:2 seemed the most accurate, natural, and clear to them personally. The purpose of the survey was to demonstrate the results of my literature review and comparative study from the perspective of the common reader.

Findings

Psalm 23:1

In the Hebrew text, according to Strong's lexical definitions, the verb *chacer* is in the imperfect tense and expresses the "future," meaning that it expresses an incomplete action or process that is about to be accomplished and has not yet begun. By retaining the original verb structure, the NASB communicates that, from a present perspective, "I shall not want," but also "I shall be supplied with whatever I need" (Henry, 1996). The original structure indicates that this is an incomplete process that will come to completion at some unspecified future time. The GNT, as a dynamic equivalent translation, however, prefers to emphasize contextual consistency over verbal consistency, which means that the translators chose to render the passage in such a way that English speakers would more naturally understand (Nichols, 1996, p. 101).

In addition, according to Barrick (2005), the word "want" is ambiguous in English, but continues to be used in more literal translations due to traditional familiarity with the King James Version (KJV) rendering of Psalm 23. From his study on Psalm 23, Barrick (2005) derives a few principles. On the one hand, ambiguity should be avoided as much as possible, and dynamic equivalence translations notoriously aim for clarity where literal renderings are more difficult to understand. On the other hand, however, Barrick (2005) notes that substituting positive phrases for negative phrases is often "unnecessary and misleading" (p. 13). In this case, the NASB renders the phrase "I shall not want," whereas the GNT translates it "I have everything I need." If meaning always takes precedence over form, according to Nida's theory, proponents of dynamic equivalence would argue that the GNT more clearly and accurately communicates the intended meaning, despite the deviation from the original structure. Supporters of formal

correspondence, however, suggest that retaining the original Hebrew forms is more accurate to

what the authors intended to say.

Westminster Leningrand Codex (WLC)	NASB	GNT
מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר׃	The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.	The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.

Figure 4. Psalm 23:1.

Proverbs 28:22

Idioms, by definition, have distinct meanings that are not necessarily deducible from the

meanings of the individual words. All languages use idioms and other devices to reflect cultural

customs, beliefs, values, and conventions. This text contains the Hebrew idiom, *ayin ha-ra* (lit.,

"the eye of the evil"), and it is woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture.

According to Kotze (2017), Evil Eye Belief and Practice (EEBP) "seems to serve as a powerful

deterrent for social comparison while encouraging submission and inaction among the poor

members of society, who are routinely accused of possessing the evil eye" (p. 1). In the context

of economic inequality, individuals accused of casting an evil eye are viewed as envious and

selfish. When read against the backdrop of the ancient Near Eastern belief system and viewed as

a linguistic vehicle for envy, *ayin ha-ra* serves specific social and cultural functions in Scripture,

and Kotze (2017) sites the narrative of Sarai and Hagar in Genesis 16 to illustrate this as well.

Westminster Leningrand Codex (WLC)	NASB	GNT
נִבְהָל לַהוֹן אִישׁ רַע עָיִן וְלֹא־יֵדַע כִּי־חֶסֶר יְבֹאֶנּוּ׃	A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth And does not know that want will come upon him.	Selfish people are in such a hurry to get rich that they do not know when poverty is about to strike.

Figure 5. Proverbs 28:22.

Figure 5 depicts the different approaches between the NASB and the GNT in this passage. Accurately, clearly, and naturally translating significant cultural idioms which are ingrained in the original cultural and linguistic settings of Scripture is the monumental task of translators, and "it remains complex to the point that it defies simple description" (Kotze, 2017, p. 22). The NASB, again, preserves the original form of the text by retaining the Hebrew idiom. The GNT makes the case, however, that certain forms "require restructuring in the interests of clear idiomatic English" (Nichols, 1996, p. 103). Although the evil eye, as Kotze (2017) explains, can be regarded as a universal idiom because of its wide geographic distribution, it is loaded with the social functions and dynamics of each cultural context, making it that much harder to analyze, transfer, and restructure.

Romans 6:2

According to Hodge, Paul's usual method of expressing denial and abhorrence comes in the form of a phrase which holds propositional and rhetorical meaning, that is to say, meaning that is both idiomatic and impactful. Literally translated "may it not be," μὴ γένοιτο occurs in seventeen instances in the New Testament and is expressed in the optative mood. According to Boyer (1988), this mood is generally used to express a wish, desire, or choice, and μὴ γένοιτο is one of the most frequently used optative phrases in Scripture (p. 129). Because of its

traditionally literary and historically complex usage, "it has become a stereotyped, idiomatic exclamation indicating revulsion and indignant, strong rejection" (Boyer, 1988, p. 130). Paul uses this expression to intentionally communicate a deeper, rhetorical meaning that the Greek readers of his day would have plainly understood.

Most English versions render such expressions dynamically for the sake of conveying the same emphatic denial Paul intended his original audience to grasp, but Brunn (2013) acknowledges that NASB chose to translate the words quite literally and render the optative mood, as well as the proceeding rhetorical question. The only dynamic choice the NASB translators made was increasing the forcefulness of the expression by replacing "not" with "never" (p. 51). The GNT, however, follows the principle that dynamics in meaning are essential to the original message. If Paul intended to grab his readers' attention quickly and completely, proponents of dynamic equivalence assert that they must find a clear, natural equivalent to accomplish the same goal. *Figure 6* illustrates this point.

Greek Septuagint (LXX)	NASB	GNT
μὴ γένοιτο οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ;	May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?	Certainly not! We have died to sin—how then can we go on living in it?

Figure 6. Romans 6:2.

Survey Results

The survey produced affirmative results while simultaneously providing additional insight into the preferences and attitudes of a particular group of Christian college students. When asked which version of the Bible they prefer, 66.7% of participants stated that they

preferred the English Standard Version, which falls on the more literal end of the spectrum.

Additionally, 13.9% of participants preferred the New International Version (see Chart 1). Only

one participant preferred the New American Standard Bible and no one selected the Good News

Translation. When asked to choose between NASB and GNT regarding the three passages under

comparative study, over half of the participants consistently selected the more literal rendering.

Without knowing which option was NASB and which was GNT, participants expressed that the

formal correspondence translations of Psalm 23:1, Proverbs 28:22, and Romans 6:2 seemed more

accurate, natural and clear (see Charts 2, 3, and 4). The results also correlated with the reality

that 75% of participants attended a church in which the pastor consistently used the English

Standard Version.

Discussion

Psalm 23:1 illustrates the problems of accuracy and ambiguity. The ability to faithfully

preserve the original message in a clear and natural way is the aim of dynamic equivalence, but it

is difficult to balance. The genre of poetry, especially, is still the most difficult to translate under

any theory because it requires attention to multiple layers of meaning (Smalley, 1991). Although

this study specifically described the accuracy and ambiguity in the Hebrew verb *chacer,* it is

important to note that features of language, including the structure of any discourse in question,

is key to understanding functions of style (Nida & Taber, 2003). Translators must strive to

preserve the meaning and style of the original language while also considering what would be

the most natural stylistic renderings in the receptor language. In the case of Psalm 23:1, a more

dynamic rendering does not seem to force a loss of deep, theological significance. However, if

we believe in the inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration of Scripture, then the question becomes whether or not we have faithfully communicated what God actually said.

When translating idioms, as seen by the concept of the "evil eye" in Proverbs 28:22, it seems dangerous to swing dramatically to the side of formal correspondence. According to Brunn (2013), "a literal translation of figurative language can often produce either wrong meaning or zero meaning," (p. 59) or simply a rendering that is unclear and unnatural. However, abandoning the original form, or structure, to accurately, clearly, and naturally express biblical idioms is often preferable. Neufield (2008) would certainly push back on this idea, however, because he asserts that, "understand[ing] the original requires understanding the social system its language encodes…[such as] ancient kinship patterns, cultural values, social expectations, and the like," (p. 13) as previously mentioned in my description of the weaknesses of dynamic equivalence. While Neufield poses a valid concern and hesitation, he seems to forget that, inherent in Nida's theory is the reality that receptors will never respond identically due to cultural and historical differences. However, translators aim to communicate the message in a way that allows people to understand it, feel its relevance, and respond appropriately (Nida & Taber, 2003). Figurative speech and literary devices are among the most complicated texts to translate dynamically, yet accurately.

Romans 6:2 highlights Paul's use of an emotionally-charged, literary mood to capture the attention of his audience in their particular context. A literal, word-for-word translation, based on Nida's four fundamental principles, would be insufficient to communicate idiomatic expressions from the biblical languages in our context today. Brunn (2013) calls μὴ γένοιτο "a

truly dynamic phrase," indicating that, aside from the NASB and a few other English versions, translators tend to agree that a forceful original requires an equally forceful translation (p. 49).

The results of the survey revealed the tendency for Christian college students to prefer a more literal translation over a more dynamic one. Although only one participant actively uses the NASB, the general trend of these participants is to gravitate toward more literal translations. When asked why they prefer the English Standard Version over other translations, participants' comments can be summarized by the following general explanations: familiarity, comprehensibility, and accuracy. The participants value the translations they grew up reading that also allow them to understand the Bible in a way that remains faithful to the original text.

Additionally, 61.1% of participants expressed that they use different translations for different purposes, such as daily reading, memorizing, and inductive study. Of these participants, the majority used dynamic translations, such as the New International Version, as a means of comparison and understanding more complicated passages. On average, participants utilized four to five translations of varying degrees of dynamic equivalence for comparison and inductive study, as well as for clarification for difficult texts.

The passages under comparative study contained phrases that are notoriously misunderstood or difficult to interpret initially to the common reader, so the results were slightly unexpected. As illustrated in Chart 2, only 15.3% of participants opted for the dynamic rendering of the classic passage. Regarding the Hebrew idiom in Proverbs 28:22, still only 27.8% of participants felt that foregoing the idiomatic expression was more accurate, natural, and clear. Participants were evenly divided, however, when selecting a preference for Romans 6:2. Consistently, these 72 young adult Christian college students use a more literal rendering,

specifically the English Standard Version, which, according to one participant, is easier to

understand than the NASB. For clarity and naturalness, participants almost always choose to

cross-reference the text with a dynamic translation, although it is not their main source of

accuracy.

Limitations

Aside from the surveys collected from 72 students at Cedarville University, my scope

was largely limited to the academic arena. The theories and perspectives I described in this

study were heavily influenced by scholars. Cedarville University students, while representing

the same general demographic category and religious worldview, may not necessarily be

representative of the majority of English-speaking Bible readers. For this reason, further study

would provide rich data and greater insight into the trend toward either more literal or more

dynamic translations among English-speaking individuals of various ages, educational levels,

religious backgrounds, Bible-reading practices, and so on. Furthermore, the aim of this study

would have been better accomplished by a greater variety of word studies and literary analyses.

A larger quantity of textual evidence would have more fully supported my original assertions,

and thus supplied additional questions for the survey. It would be helpful to identify which

literary devices produce a stronger desire for a more dynamic rendering, and which produce a

neutral or negative desire.

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Conclusion

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In summary, dynamic equivalence theory approaches Bible translation with the aim of

producing the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message that prioritizes meaning

over form. The goal of this critical analysis was to assert that a more dynamic Bible translation

is more useful by clearly defining Eugene A. Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence, describing

its respective strengths and weaknesses, and demonstrating this claim by conducting a

comparative study among the biblical genres of poetry, proverbs, and the Pauline epistles, and by

illustrating a sociolinguistic perspective of a particular population. I intended to clearly display

many of Nida's principles in practice in order to provide implications for believers who want to

accurately, clearly, and naturally understand Scripture.

 Realistically speaking, as Brunn (2013) suggests, every major language ought to have a

new literal translation and a new dynamic translation every twenty years because both have

valuable components. My literature review revealed that scholars fall on both sides of the

spectrum and everywhere in between, all with substantial evidence to support their preferences.

My study of accuracy and ambiguity in Psalm 23:1, a Hebrew idiom in Proverbs 28:22, and the

optative mood in Romans 6:2 further emphasized the complexities and difficulties that arise from

this endeavor. To say that Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence is more useful in every

circumstance is a gross exaggeration and would be entirely inaccurate, and the survey supports

this discovery. While a dynamic translation is often more useful with regards to clarity and

naturalness, especially for complex biblical passages, it is not always the most faithful to what

the authors, by divine inspiration, originally intended. The survey participants acknowledged the

value of translations of dynamic equivalence despite their stronger preference toward a more

literal rendering. According to Nida and Taber (2003), however, if people misunderstand a

translation, it cannot be regarded as a legitimate translation. The survey reveals that balance is

key. Smalley (1991) concludes in favor of a continued pursuit of increasingly accurate dynamic

translations because they have "helped rescue the Bible from being a dusty relic to being the 'living oracles' of God" (p. 132).

We must never sacrifice our faithfulness to God's inspired Word on the altars of our personal preferences. It is often more comfortable to ignore our responsibility to personally study the Word of God when there are dynamic translations available that have gone so far as to dictate what Scripture *means* rather than what it *says*. Thus "the real problems of translation are not technical, they are human," Nida (2003) explains, "[and] the ultimate solutions involve the transformation of the human spirit" (p. 186). When selecting which translation, or translations, to read for our personal study and understanding, Nida & Taber (2003) suggest approaching the conversation with humility, openness, spiritual sensitivity, and reverence (p. 186). Remaining faithful to the inspired meaning and form of the original biblical languages in a way that is clear, accurate, and natural is the highest aim of the translator, and dynamic equivalence is often, but not always a more useful translation method that affords every image-bearer the opportunity to read and understand what God has to say.

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Appendix A

- What is your denominational affiliation?
  - Baptist
  - Presbyterian
  - Non-denominational
  - Unaffiliated
  - Other: _____
- Which version of the Bible does your pastor typically use?
  - New American Standard Bible (NASB)
  - King James Version (KJV)
  - English Standard Version (ESV)
  - The Good News Translation (GNT)
  - Other: _____
- How often do you read the Bible?
  - Every day
  - A few times a week
  - Weekly
  - Occasionally
  - Other: _____
- Which version of the Bible do you prefer?
  - New American Standard Bible (NASB)
  - King James Version (KJV)
  - English Standard Version (ESV)
  - The Good News Translation (GNT)
  - Other: _____
- Why do you prefer that particular version?
- Do you use different versions for different purposes?
  - Yes
  - No, I consistently use the same version.
- If yes, which version(s) and for what purpose(s)?
- Which of the following translations of Psalm 23:1 seems the most accurate, natural, and clear to you?
  - "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
  - "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need."
- Which of the following translations of Proverbs 28:22 seems the most accurate, natural, and clear to you?
  - "A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth and does not know that want will come upon him."
  - "Selfish people are in such a hurry to get rich that they do not know when poverty is about to strike."
- Which of the following translations of Romans 6:2 seems the most accurate, natural, and clear to you?
  - "May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"
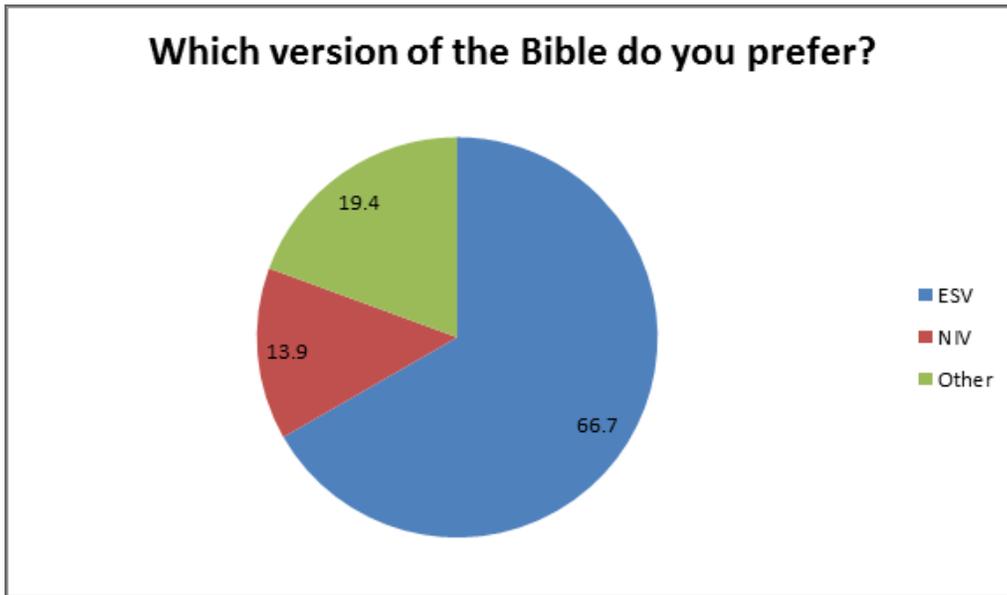 - "Certainly not! We have died to sin--how then can we go on living in it?"

Chart 1

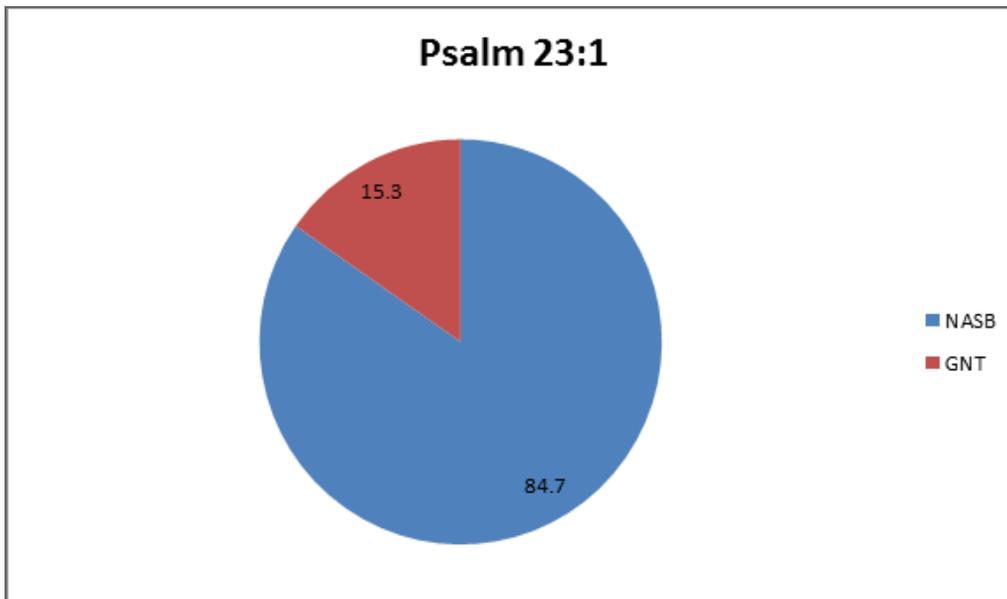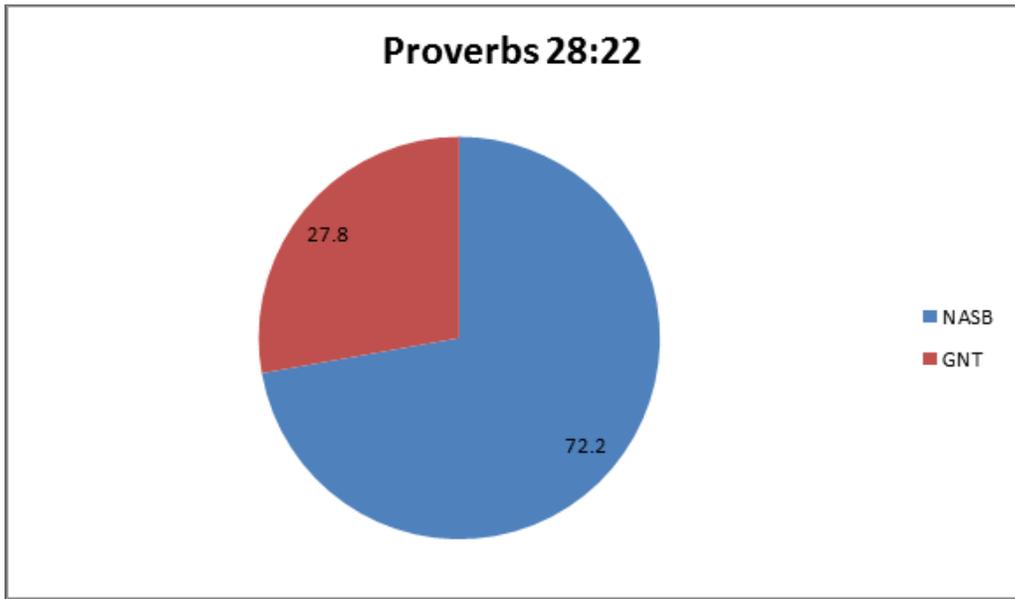Which version of the Bible do you prefer?

- ESV — 66.7
- NIV — 13.9
- Other — 19.4

Chart 2

Psalm 23:1

- NASB — 84.7
- GNT — 15.3

Chart 3

Proverbs 28:22

Chart 4

Romans 6:2