

Towards redeeming 'loyalty' in functionalist Bible translation using the Hebrew *hesed* concept

**Author:**Tobias J. Houston^{1,2} **Affiliations:**

¹Department of Hebrew,
Faculty of The Humanities,
University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein, South Africa

²Baptist Mission Australia,
Melbourne, Australia

Corresponding author:

Tobias Houston,
houstontj@ufs.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 01 Aug. 2022

Accepted: 25 Oct. 2022

Published: 23 Jan. 2023

How to cite this article:

Houston, T.J., 2023, 'Towards redeeming 'loyalty' in functionalist Bible translation using the Hebrew *hesed* concept', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(2), a7983. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.7983>

Copyright:

© 2023. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work
is licensed under the
Creative Commons
Attribution License.

Within translation studies, functionalist translations and even more specifically, translations guided by Skopos theory are very much purposeful activities. Skopos theory applied to Bible translation, however, is sometimes met with resistance by practitioners who believe that Skopos theory betrays too much of the source text. This article began by outlining Skopos theory and the additional notion of loyalty as introduced by Christiane Nord. Even with loyalty applied to the theory, many Bible translation practitioners continue to fear it. After the initial presentation of Skopos theory plus loyalty, the Hebrew lexeme *hesed* (*hesed*) was introduced in this article and discussed in relation to its biblical use. The discussion of *hesed* was then widened to functionalist Bible translation to redeem the loyalty notion as applied to Bible translation. This article claimed that *hesed* as loyalty further helps to protect both the source text and target audiences from radical or unacceptable translations.

Contribution: Bible translation is a purposeful activity. This article attempted to allay the fears that some Bible translation practitioners have about the possibility of radical translations undertaken using Skopos theory. Loyalty as understood through the lens of the Hebrew *hesed* (*hesed*) was utilised afresh to allay these fears.

Keywords: Bible translation; Skopos theory; *Skopostheorie*; translation model; loyalty; translation studies; *hesed*; functionalist translation; ethical translation; Christiane Nord.

Introduction

The purposefulness of Bible translations is generally assumed by those involved in them, even if those same people do not explicitly recognise this as such. In functionalist translation, and more particularly that guided by Skopos theory, the purposefulness of translation is made explicit. When Skopos theory is applied to Bible translation, however, critics fear that this theory allows for, or even inevitably results in, radical and inappropriate translations of the biblical text. This article first outlines Skopos theory before highlighting the notion of loyalty as developed by Christiane Nord. This addition of loyalty to Skopos theory is intended to act as a safeguard against translations that ignore the communicative intentions of the source text and its author. With a view to redeeming the concept of loyalty in functionalist Bible translation, the Hebrew lexeme *hesed* [*hesed*] is discussed as it appears in the Bible. The term is then applied to the Bible translation situation to further reinforce the concept of loyalty as a safeguard for both the source text (author) and target audience.

Skopos theory and 'loyalty' according to Nord

Skopos theory is 'a general translation theory for all texts' (Munday 2016:127) with historical roots in action theory and other theories regarding intercultural communication (see also Nord 2012:26). As a formalised conceptualisation, Skopos theory developed primarily from the writings of Hans Vermeer (1978, 1979, 1989) and was further supplemented by other German scholars such as Katharina Reiss (Reiss & Vermeer 1984). Since this initial phase, Christiane Nord (e.g. 1997a, 1997b, 2001, 2005a, 2014, 2018) further developed and continues to contribute significantly to the study of Skopos theory and functional approaches to translation. The word *skopos*, as used by the theory, is a term borrowed from Greek that can mean 'purpose' or 'aim' (Nord 1997b:27; Reiss & Vermeer 2014:86). Skopos theory is, therefore, defined as a functionalist approach because it is the purpose, or function, of the translated target text that serves as the central concern and measure of successful translation.

Functionalist approaches to translation contrast with more static linguistic translation approaches that espouse one specific translation strategy, such as equivalence. Skopos theory is not an approach to individual translation choices in a text but is the framework by which one can determine the

Read online:

Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

appropriate translation strategy for the situation. Nord (2010) helpfully defines functionalist approaches as ‘the idea of choosing translation strategies according to translation purposes’ (p. 120). Notably, ‘the term *Skopos* usually refers to the purpose of the target text’ (Nord 1997b:28).

The most apparent practical hallmark and a common feature of Skopos theory is the ‘translation brief’. The translation brief is fundamentally a document that outlines the instructions of the translation task, including the intended function of the translation product. In essence, the idea of a translation brief is not new. Still, it is an attempt to make explicit something that has always existed (Vermeer 2004:236): that translators conduct their work according to a specific purpose, whether they are consciously aware of this or not. The translation brief becomes an essential guide for translators in their attempt to remain faithful to the *skopos* and accountable to the instructions given to them. Nord claims that it is ‘the receiver, or rather the addressee, [that] is the main factor determining the target-text *Skopos*’ (Nord 1997b:29). It is then up to the translator to interpret the source text and determine the extent to which a change in form is required when producing the translated text. If the intended function of the new text differs from that of the source text, Skopos theory allows a change of form to enable the successful fulfilment of the translated text’s purpose. A significant criticism of Skopos theory is that the approach supposedly allows translators to produce what Nathan Esala (2013:303) calls (despite himself being an advocate of Skopos theory) ‘radical or utilitarian’ texts, according to whatever intended function is desired, regardless of the intentions of the source text. This is a valid criticism of the version of Skopos theory espoused by Vermeer. To defend Skopos theory from this criticism, Nord (1997b:125) introduces the relational concept of *loyalty* as an important development of the theory.

Loyalty mainly involves the ‘responsibility translators have towards their partners in translational action’ (Nord 1997b:125). So, in Nord’s (1997b) ‘function *plus* loyalty’ (p. 126) version of the functionalist approach, it is the combination of both the function of the translated text and loyalty (Nord 2005b:32) that is important. Loyalty in Nord’s (1997b) thinking:

[R]efers to the interpersonal relationship between the translator, the source-text sender, the target-text addressees and the initiator. Loyalty limits the range of justifiable target-text functions for one particular source text. (p. 126)

A key aspect for Nord is that her loyalty concept focuses on the notion of a relationship as a bilateral commitment to both the source and target sides (Nord 2018:115). This aspect differs from a focus on fidelity or faithfulness in some translation strategies. These are concepts that generally refer to correspondence between source and target *texts*. For Nord (2018), loyalty ‘is an interpersonal category referring to a social relationship between *people*’ (p. 115), limiting radical functionalism because a translation’s purpose ‘should be

compatible with the original author’s intentions’ (Nord 2018:115). Eliciting what the original author’s intentions are (or were) is one of the challenges for the translator. For Bible translation, the standard practices of exegesis are precious for eliciting this kind of information about the original author’s intentions.

Even with the addition of loyalty, some scholars criticise Skopos theory and functionalist approaches to translation for allowing too much deviation from the source text. This criticism is seen, for example, in Peter Newmark’s claims that ‘to translate the word “aim” into Greek, and make a translation theory out of it, and to exclude any moral factor except loyalty...is pretending too much and going too far’ (Newmark 2000:259). But careful consideration of the theory itself, particularly in the version formulated by Christiane Nord that promotes loyalty to the source text author, reveals that such criticism is an overreaction. Radical deviation from the source text only comes to the fore if the *skopos* itself explicitly determines a departure from it, but this is not the fault of Skopos theory. It is the fault of those ordering such a translation without loyalty. In fact, Nord (2002) claims that the principle of loyalty turns Skopos theory into ‘an anti-universalist model’ (p. 36) because it respects the ‘sender’ and the original intentions of the communication. In this article, Skopos theory with *loyalty* does not prescribe an *anything-goes* approach to the translation task. It is a relational and moral concept that limits what a translator can ethically do with a source text. However, as some scholars continue to fear the possibility of radical translations according to whatever brief is devised for any given translation, particularly those working in the realm of Bible translation, emphasising the concept of loyalty and the moral responsibility of ‘the translator to respect the sender’s individual communicative intentions, as far as they can be elicited’ (Nord 2010:126) is critical. Strengthening the concept of loyalty in functionalist Bible translation using the Hebrew notion of *hesed* will form an important outcome of this article moving forward. Before we can do that, however, we need to look at what *hesed* is.

The Hebrew lexeme **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*) in the Bible

Studies on the Hebrew lexeme **חֶסֶד** (hereafter ‘*hesed*’) are numerous. Dissertations, monographs, dictionary entries and journal articles all serve as treatments on the *hesed* concept. Some of the most well-known studies on the Hebrew term *hesed* include Glueck (1927), Sakenfeld (1978, 1985) and Clark (1993). The noun *hesed* appears almost 250 times in the Hebrew Bible, with no verbal counterpart represented in the biblical text (Sakenfeld 1992:376). The distribution of its use among the biblical books is varied, with at least one use of the term occurring in every book except for Leviticus, 2 Kings, Ezekiel, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and several of the Minor Prophets. *Hesed* appears the most number of times in Psalms, with 127 occurrences. Psalm 136 alone accounts for 26 of those occurrences in the repeated refrain at the end of

each verse: *יְיָ לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדוֹ* ('for his *steadfast love* [*hesed*] endures forever', NRSV).

In Hebrew lexicons, some of the possible English glosses for *hesed* include 'joint obligation' (Köhler, Baumgartner & Stamm 2000), 'loyalty' (Clines 1996; Köhler, Baumgartner & Stamm 2000), 'faithfulness' (Clines 1996; Köhler & Baumgartner 2000), 'goodness' (Köhler, Baumgartner & Stamm 2000), and 'kindness' (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1906; Köhler, Baumgartner & Stamm 2000). In English Bible translations, *hesed* is variously translated as 'steadfast love' (Ps 136 NRSV), 'loyalty' (Dt 7:9; Pr 19:22; Jnh 2:8; 14 other occurrences in NRSV – 1 Ki 2:7 has 'deal loyally'), 'kindness' (Gn 19:19; Rt 2:20, ESV; and many other occasions), 'love' (Pr 21:21 NIV), and 'mercy' (Pr 21:21 KJV). This list of glosses and examples of translations for *hesed* is not exhaustive. Still, it shows the difficulty of restricting such a polyvalent term and concept to only one word in English (Clark 1993:267). In discussions about *hesed*, it is often described theologically about God's 'loving-kindness' – a type of kindness that goes above and beyond the common notion of kindness or good behaviour. Indeed, the relational aspect of *hesed* appears central to the concept (Baer & Gordon 1997:211). Although more recent studies have superseded Glueck's analysis (1927), he wrote of this relational aspect in his emphasis of *hesed* as behaviour arising 'from a relationship defined by rights and obligations' (Stoebe 1997:452). Hans-Jürgen Zobel identifies reciprocity in the practice of *hesed* by claiming that 'the one who receives an act of *hesed* responds with a similar act of *hesed*' (Zobel 1977:47), or at least that the one receiving *hesed* is justified in expecting such a reciprocal act. This idea of mutual obligation is evident when we observe that many examples of *hesed* involve relationships. That is, *hesed* appears in relationships between spouses (Abraham and Sarah in Gn 20:13), between father and son (Israel and Joseph in Gn 47:29), between hosts and guests (Gn 19:19; 21:23), and between friends (1 Sm 20:8, 14, 15), among others.

Although many emphasise the theological relevance of *hesed* in terms of its application to God and his *hesed* towards people, the word itself is also commonly used in the secular realm among people. The examples immediately above attest to this reality. However, when we consider *hesed* applied to YHWH, it seems to be used in such a way that it 'indicates an essential part of God's character' and that his '*hesed* is closely associated with his covenant love for Israel' (Frederick 2014; see also Clark 1993:267). Indeed, Fredericks suggests that *hesed* is definable as 'loyal love' and '[r]efers to feelings of loyalty and love that motivate merciful and compassionate behavior toward a person' (Frederick 2014). Importantly, however, this is not just feelings of loyalty but "'demonstrated loyalty," i.e., loyalty that exhibits itself in actions rather than words or sentiments' (Mobley 2000:827). The emphasis on loyalty is seen most obviously in NRSV English translations of *hesed*, where 'loyalty' or 'deal loyally' appears on over 20 occasions. For example, in Deuteronomy 7:9, the writer explains that YHWH is 'the faithful God who maintains covenant *loyalty*

[*hesed*] with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations' (NRSV). The eternal nature of YHWH's *hesed* is strongly emphasised in Psalm 136's twenty six refrains of 'his steadfast love [*hesed*] endures forever'. In 2 Samuel 2:5, David blesses the people of Jabesh-Gilead for being those who buried Saul, saying, 'May you be blessed by the LORD, because you showed this *loyalty* [*hesed*] to Saul' (NRSV). In Psalm 101:1, David sings of '*loyalty* [*hesed*] and of justice; to you, O LORD, I will sing' (NRSV). In Proverbs, loyalty is to be sought after and is crucial for a king to have: 'What is desirable in a person is *loyalty* [*hesed*]' (Pr 19:22) and '*Loyalty* [*hesed*] and faithfulness preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by righteousness' (Pr 20:28). The prophet Hosea laments the lack of *loyalty* [*hesed*] and faithfulness in the land (Hs 4:1) and Jonah warns that 'Those who worship vain idols forsake their true *loyalty* [*hesed*]' (Jnh 2:8).

Hesed as loyalty in these passages and in others, such as Micah 7:20, refers to an unswerving commitment to another in steadfast love. In Deuteronomy 7, YHWH chose Israel not because they were worthy or dominant as a people but because he loved them. This love manifested itself in the loyalty he showed them in rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. On a more human level, loyalty appears in the context of something one does for another and as something desirable to obtain as a character trait. Being loyal is based on the reality of a relationship – even if the relationship itself is not because of any previous action or worthiness. It is a gracious posture to be loyal to another, whether it is YHWH being loyal to the people he has chosen or the loyalty shown among friends, as in the case of David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:8, 14, 15.

Hesed is steadfast love, loving-kindness and loyalty shown through action. It concerns loyalty between God and humans, between humans and other humans, and between humans in relation to God. With the sum of the observations above, we can discuss how *hesed* moves towards reinforcing the *loyalty* concept in functionalist, Skopos theory-oriented Bible translation.

Introducing *hesed* to redeem the 'loyalty' concept in functionalist Bible translation

In a recent popular-level article on the *Journal of Biblical Missiology* website, Seth Vitrano-Wilson (2021) expresses a deep fear of many Christians that functionalist Bible translation inevitably leads to syncretism. Even when supplemented by Christiane Nord's loyalty concept, this, according to Vitrano-Wilson, only 'solves half the problem' in functionalist Bible translation because '[o]ur loyalty cannot be split between two masters'. For example, this concept of loyalty for Vitrano-Wilson might be able to keep us loyal to God, but 'we cannot simultaneously maintain equal loyalty to God as author and to the target audience's "needs and expectations"' (Vitrano-Wilson 2021). This fear and criticism

of functionalist Bible translation, even when supplemented by loyalty, motivates this article's attempt to redeem *loyalty* using the Hebrew *hesed* concept. The complaints about radical Skopos theory are valid for Bible translation. This is especially true considering that most of those working in Bible translation are committed followers of Jesus and expect that God's Word is faithfully translated. Of course, what 'faithful' translation means is debated at length in the Bible translation community, often at the level of discussions over equivalence theories of translation. Some argue that the only faithful English translations of the Bible are formally equivalent ones such as the New American Standard Bible, New Revised Standard Version and English Standard Version. Others argue for dynamic equivalence and promote translations such as the New Living Translation or Good News Bible. Within Skopos theory plus loyalty, either equivalence approach might be valid in a situation depending on the *skopos* as defined through an adequate process of determining how to be loyal to both source (God) and target audience (Houston 2022:4). Beyond simply equivalence theories of translation at 'kernel' levels (Nida & Taber 1969:39), for example, are discussions about foreignisation *vis-à-vis* domestication strategies. This strategy applies to the task of translation as a whole instead of just the linguistic aspects. Limiting Bible translation strategy discussions to only about equivalence is short-sighted and inadequate for many of the world's remaining Bible translation needs. Instead of dismissing Skopos theory plus loyalty as inadequate for appropriate Bible translation in a Christian context as Vitrano-Wilson appears to do, this article will attempt to preserve the benefits of Nord's loyalty concept by redeeming it through an application of *hesed*.

An undergirding assumption here is that all translation is done according to a specific purpose (Vermeer 2004:236), regardless of whether this is consciously known or explicitly stated. Considering this reality, utilising Skopos theory with loyalty becomes valuable because it provides direction through the translation brief. However, loyalty ungrounded in something outside itself is liable to be used according to the whims of the translator (this is a problem of morality in general – who gets to define what is moral and what is not?). The Hebrew lexeme *hesed* helps to keep us on a better track regarding what loyalty might mean for functionalist Bible translation. Given that it is Bible translation in mind here, it seems appropriate that this discussion around what *loyalty* is comes from the Bible itself.

Therefore, the next section will look at two ways in which biblical *hesed* motivates loyalty in Bible translation: (1) in translators maintaining loyalty to the source text (God) as in the *humans to God* pattern of *hesed* exemplified in biblical passages mentioned below; (2) in *humans to humans* as in the cases of *hesed* between people in other examples to be mentioned below. An underlying basis for both directions of *hesed* is the *God to human* category. This category connects with the notion that God has already shown loyalty to humans by giving us his word in the first place, thereby establishing *hesed* as originating from God himself as a

manifestation of his character. For Christian translators of the Bible, in particular, we might even suggest that 'word' in this context can ambiguously refer to the word of God as in the written Scriptures, but also as the *Logos* of John 1:1–18 in the New Testament.

Loyalty to the source text (author)

Although Nord tends to speak of loyalty to the source text *author* as opposed to the source *text* per se (Nord 2018:115), in this article, we take loyalty to the source text as essentially the same thing in practice. That is, loyalty is not about the source text on a form level as though the individual pen strokes on vellum or paper are what constitutes *the* authoritative source text. This view would make copies of such a manuscript redundant as an authority. On the contrary, textual criticism shows us that this viewpoint would be untenable because of variants that exist between manuscripts (and the non-existence of *the* original manuscripts anyway). Instead, loyalty to the source text implicitly refers to the original author and their communicative intentions. Just because we only have copies of the source text does not lessen the reality that what we have are preserved authentic messages from the original author. Therefore, when speaking of loyalty to the source text in this article, we mean loyalty to the source text author in the sense of an interpersonal relationship between translator and author.

Hosea laments that 'There is no faithfulness or loyalty [*hesed*], and no knowledge of God in the land' (Hs 4:1 NRSV). Bible translation should be conducted under the assumption of loyalty to God. Even translators of the Bible who are not God-fearers can maintain loyalty by conducting themselves ethically towards the source text through responsible exegesis (in this sense, the values of *hesed* loyalty to the source text in Bible translation can be widened to any translation endeavour). Indeed, Christian translators must also conduct themselves responsibly in this way. Hosea further reminds Israel that YHWH desires 'steadfast love [*hesed*] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings' (Hs 6:6 NRSV). Bible translation requires a posture of loyalty and not a posture of legalism or pedantry to form. Jonah warns that 'Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty [*hesed*]' (Jnh 2:8 NRSV). Although Jonah is referring to actual worship of idols, translating the Bible in a way that is supposedly faithful because of formal equivalence, for example, but is rejected by the target audience may be risking true loyalty to both God and audience by insisting on such translation approaches. In the task of functionalist Bible translation, then, there must be *hesed* towards the source on the part of those doing and responsible for the translation. This *hesed* is relational in that the translators are in a relationship with the source text as a manifestation of the *hesed* of God himself to humanity. The translation brief could explicitly reflect this posture of the translator to the source text and God. With this posture at the forefront, functionalist Bible translation, Skopos theory and the translation brief are limited in their radicalism based on the translator's steadfast and loyal relationship with the source of their translation.

In this *hesed* version of loyalty for functionalist Bible translation, the loyalty shown to the source text precedes any loyalties to other parties such as the target audience. Such precedence does not exclude the possibility of simultaneous loyalty to the target audience, as Vitrano-Wilson fears. Loyalty to the source text comes first, but that is not the same as abandoning loyalty to the intended audience. Also, loyalty to the intended audience does not mean abandoning loyalty to the source text. It is not about serving two masters who are at odds with one another. Utilising *hesed* as loyalty in Bible translation is not about servitude to masters but about the translator's relationship with the source text (God) and the target text (represented by its end users). At its core is coming to terms with the reality that all translations happen according to a purpose, but the guiding principle of *hesed* loyalty will inhibit radical *skopoi* and translations. For Christian translators of the Bible, radical translations are those that do not show *hesed* to the source text author (ultimately God). However, equally radical translations are those which may pay attention to the source text author but abandon loyalty to the target text receivers. This is just as radical because the translation is ineffective in reaching the audience in their context. The whole point of doing translation in the first place is lost.

Loyalty to the target audience

We established that Bible translation must first be loyal to the source text and its author. For Christians, the ultimate author is God himself, so loyalty to the source text is paramount. However, Bible translators also need to consider the audience to which they are translating. A so-called 'faithful' translation may be rejected if the target audience's needs are unmet. These unmet needs may be linguistic, based on an incompatible equivalence strategy in place, or it may be because of other sociocultural or religious issues related to the form of the end product not matching target community expectations. For example, this could be an issue as seemingly innocuous to Western outsiders as a black cover on a printed Bible in a Muslim context. In Genesis 47:29, Joseph's father, Israel (Jacob), is dying. He makes Joseph swear to him, if he finds favour with Joseph, that Joseph must 'deal loyally' (*hesed*, NRSV) with him by promising to bury him outside of Egypt in the land of Canaan along with his ancestors. This moment is very relational. *Hesed* manifests as the loving act of a son to grant his father's dying wish. In numerous other instances, *hesed* appears in relationships between people – between Abraham and his wife Sarah (Gn 20:13), between Abraham and the king Abimelech (Gn 21:23), and between David and his friend Jonathan (1 Sm 20:8), among others. Key to the point is the fact of relationship with others. Suppose a Bible translation is a true manifestation of God's initiatory *hesed* in sending his word in the first place. In that case, it is vital to show that same loyalty to the target audience in a reciprocal act of *hesed* towards God. Such mutuality of *hesed* is defended by Robin Routledge, who claims that '[h]esed is expected of those to whom *hesed* ... has been shown' (Routledge 1995:181). Indeed, if Christians translating the Bible are members of God's covenant, then his 'covenant community are to show *hesed* in their relationships with one

another' (Routledge 1995:195). However, even though showing *hesed* to others is a natural and proper response to God's display of *hesed*, loyalty to the target audience's needs is not a licence to do whatever a translator wants at the expense of loyalty to the source text author.

Loyalty to the target audience means we must take their needs seriously out of love when formulating the translation brief and doing the translation itself. It simply will not do to dismiss the existing context as invalid as a vessel for communicating the biblical text meaningfully. The original text came to its original audience in a way that was meaningful to them. Loyalty to the target audience may result in forms, and even mediums, that are very different from the source text. For example, an oral Bible translation might be used in a context where the target audience cannot engage in written texts. Would such an application of orality in place of a written manuscript be evidence of disloyalty to the source text or God? Some would likely suggest that it is. However, Biblical Performance Criticism perspectives inform us that much of the biblical text seems to already consist of an underlying orality (Rhoads 2010:157; Wendland 2013:12). In this case, utilising orality in the present as a medium of translation might be simultaneously *more* loyal to both the source and target.

Remember, the defining aspect of *hesed* in loyal Bible translation is relationship. At some point, we must accept that there will always be disagreement about the 'correct' way to do things. Therefore, a *skopos* and a translation brief are important. If we have a relationship both with God (source) and people (target), then we should be able to produce faithful and adequate Bible translations that show disloyalty to neither. Loyalty for this article is not just an abstract concept but a posture characterised by a genuine relationship between translator and source and between translator and target. Indeed, for the Bible translator, it goes even further: it is about mediating a relationship between source and target. The translator must imagine themselves as in dialogue with both parties and show loyalty to each through the translations they produce. Sometimes these translations will be dynamically equivalent, formally equivalent, domesticating, foreignising, or otherwise. But all of them should be loyal.

Such a relational posture should alleviate many of the fears that critics of *Skopos* theory plus loyalty have. The fear writers such as Vitrano-Wilson have about syncretism and radical translations could be alleviated by applying *hesed* to the loyalty concept in functionalist Bible translation. Using *hesed* to characterise loyalty provides a biblical basis for the idea and preserves the status of the original author (who for many is God himself).

Conclusion

This article began by summarising the principal characteristics of *Skopos* theory, particularly as it is manifested with the additional safeguard of 'loyalty'. It was noted that some

translation studies scholars remain critical of Skopos theory because, in their eyes, it allows for too much deviation from the source text. To redeem the insights of Nord's loyalty concept for Bible translation, this article then considered the biblical Hebrew use of the term *hesed* and how it brings us towards a truer loyalty to both the source text (God) and the target situation (people). In the future, it would be valuable to further consider the part that covenant (בְּרִית-בְּרִית) plays in *hesed* formulations and whether we might be able to consider translation briefs as akin to covenant commitments in our Bible translation endeavours.

Acknowledgements

I thank my wife, Heather, for greatly encouraging me as I continue to ponder loyalty in Bible translation and finding ways to ensure that both the source and target are remembered.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

T.J.H. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable in this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Baer, D.A. & Gordon, R.P., 1997, 'הֶסֶד', in W. Van Gemeren (ed.), *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology & exegesis*, pp. 211–218, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Brown, F., Driver, S.R. & Briggs, C.A. (eds.), 1906, 'הֶסֶד', in *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, pp. 338–339, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Clark, G.R., 1993, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Press, Sheffield.
- Clines, D.J.A. (ed.), 1996, 'הֶסֶד', in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew: Volume 3 Zayin – Teth*, pp. 277–281, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Esala, N., 2013, 'Implementing Skopostheorie in Bible translation', *The Bible Translator* 64(3), 300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2051677013507216>

- Frederick, J., 2014, 'Mercy and compassion', in D. Mangum (ed.), *The Lexham theological wordbook (Logos Bible Software edition)*, Lexham Press, Bellingham.
- Glueck, N., 1927, *Das Wort hesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche und göttliche gemeinschaftgemässe Verhaltensweise*, Töpelmann, Berlin.
- Houston, T.J., 2022, "'Not getting what you ask for" from rapid appraisal surveys: A new model to assess Bible translation needs', *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 78(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7532>
- Köhler, L., Baumgartner, W. & Stamm, J.J. (eds.), 2000, 'הֶסֶד וּ', in *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*, pp. 336–337, Brill, Leiden.
- Mobley, G., 2000, 'Loving-kindness', in D.N. Freedman, A.C. Myers & A.B. Beck (eds.), *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 826–827, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Munday, J., 2016, *Introducing translation studies: Theories and applications*, 4th edn., Routledge, London.
- Newmark, P., 2000, 'The deficiencies of Skopos theory: A response to Anna Trosborg', *Current Issues In Language and Society* 7(3), 259–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13520520009615586>
- Nida, E.A. & Taber, C.R., 1969, *The theory and practice of translation*, Brill, Leiden.
- NIV: New International Version of the Bible*, 2011, Biblica, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Nord, C., 1997a, *Translating as a purposeful activity: Functionalist approaches explained*, St Jerome, Manchester.
- Nord, C., 1997b, 'Defining translation functions: The translation brief as a guideline for the trainee translator', *Ilha do Desterro* 33, 41–55.
- Nord, C., 2001, 'Loyalty revisited: Bible translation as a case in point', *Translator* 7(2), 185–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2001.10799100>
- Nord, C., 2002, 'Manipulation and loyalty in functional translation', *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 14(2), 32–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.2002.9678123>
- Nord, C., 2005a, 'Making otherness accessible. Functionality and Skopos in the translation of New Testament texts', *Meta* 50(3), 868–880. <https://doi.org/10.7202/011602ar>
- Nord, C., 2005b, *Text analysis in translation: Theory, methodology, and didactic application of a model for translation-oriented text analysis*, 2nd edn., Rodopi, Amsterdam.
- Nord, C., 2010, 'Functionalist approaches', in Y. Gambier & L. Van Doorslaer (eds.), *Handbook of translation studies: Volume 1*, pp. 120–128, John Benjamins Publishing Co., Amsterdam.
- Nord, C., 2012, 'Quo vadis, functional translology?', *Target: International Journal on Translation Studies* 24(1), 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.24.1.03nor>
- Nord, C., 2014, 'Function and loyalty in Bible translation', in M. Calzada-Pérez (ed.), *Apropos of ideology: Translation studies on ideology – Ideologies in translation studies*, pp. 89–112, Routledge, London.
- Nord, C., 2018, *Translating as a purposeful activity*, 2nd edn., Routledge, Abingdon.
- NRSV: New Revised Standard Version*, 1989, Collins Publishers, New York, NY.
- Reiss, K. & Vermeer, H.J., 1984, *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, Niemeyer, Tübingen.
- Reiss, K. & Vermeer, H.J., 2014, *Towards a general theory of translational action: Skopos theory explained*, Routledge, London.
- Rhoads, D., 2010, 'Biblical performance criticism: Performance as research', *Oral Tradition* 25(1), 157–198.
- Routledge, R., 1995, 'Hesed as obligation: A re-examination', *Tyndale Bulletin* 46(1), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30408>
- Sakenfeld, K.D., 1978, *The meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, Scholars Press, Missoula, MT.
- Sakenfeld, K.D., 1985, *Faithfulness in action: Loyalty in biblical perspective*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- Sakenfeld, K.D., 1992, 'Love – Old Testament', in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible dictionary*, vol. 4, pp. 375–381, Doubleday, New York, NY.
- Stoebe, H.J., 1997, 'הֶסֶד', in E. Jenni & C. Westermann (eds.), *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA.
- Vermeer, H.J., 1978, 'Ein Rahmen für eine allgemeine Translationstheorie', *Lebende Sprache* 23, 99–102. <https://doi.org/10.1515/les.1978.23.3.99>
- Vermeer, H.J., 1979, 'Vom, richtigen' Übersetzen', *Mitteilungsblatt für Dolmetscher und Übersetzer* 25(4), 2–8.
- Vermeer, H.J., 1989, 'Skopos and commission in translational action', in A. Chesterman (ed.), *Readings in translation*, pp. 173–187, Oy Finn Lectura A, Helsinki.
- Vermeer, H.J., 2004, 'Skopos and commission in translational action', in L. Venuti (ed.), *The translation studies reader*, pp. 227–238, Routledge, London.
- Vitrano-Wilson, S., 2021, *Functionalism: Why the new dominant paradigm of Bible translation makes syncretism inevitable*, viewed 05 July 2022, from <https://biblicalmissiology.org/2021/05/17/functionalism-why-the-new-dominant-paradigm-of-bible-translation-makes-syncretism-inevitable/>.
- Wendland, E.R., 2013, *Orality and the scriptures: Composition, translation, and transmission*, SIL International, Dallas, TX.
- Zobel, H., 1977, 'הֶסֶד hesed', in G. Botterweck & J.H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.