

MISSING MATTHEW'S MEANING. OR: TOWARDS A NODDING ACQUAINTANCE
WITH 'TEXTUAL MEANING' (AND, MAYBE, WITH 'CONTEXT' TOO)

Walter K. Winckler
Department of General Linguistics
University of Stellenbosch

1 Introduction

Ideally the talk I would like to give this morning would be a talk which did equal justice, or equal injustice, to four questions and their answers as discussed in Gutt (1991:chapter 4). Very roughly sketched, these questions and answers are the following:

1. "If we accept that a translation should convey the meaning of the original, can we build a theory of translation on the basis of this requirement?"
 - "No."
2. "What is the meaning of the original text of Matthew 2?"
 - "That Jesus' obscure Galilean background poses no real problem to Jewish Christians."
3. "Do existing English translations of Matthew 2 succeed in conveying the meaning of the original?"
 - "No."
4. "What is the cause of this failure?"
 - "The inevitable part played in verbal communication by assumptions which make up the immediate cognitive environments of the speaker and the audience."

These are not simple matters, however, and I am not a virtuoso speaker nor even just a high-speed speaker. So my envisaged

topics will probably find neither the justice nor the injustice I'm doing to them anywhere near equal. Which is why I will let the above outline stand as notice of at least the intended scope of my talk. And so, to business.

In 1989, Ernst-August Gutt completed a doctoral dissertation at University College London, his topic being the theoretical foundations of translation. A member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, he had brought to this study more than ten years' experience of work in Africa "doing linguistic research and lecturing at the Addis Ababa University" and developing "courses and materials for training translators in an African context"; I'm quoting here from one of the blurbs of his book, based on his dissertation and published in 1991. The supervisor of his doctoral studies was Deirdre Wilson, linguist, who along with Dan Sperber, anthropologist, has since the late seventies been developing the relevance theory of communication. And so the title of Gutt's book comes as no surprise; he calls his book *Translation and relevance*.

The talk I'll be giving today should be taken as barely scratching the surface of two broad aspects of Gutt's work on the theoretical foundations of translation. Let me indicate these two aspects in terms of questions. *First aspect:* in specific --- "nitty gritty" --- terms,

- ° how does Gutt illustrate his application of relevance theory to the practice of translation?

Second aspect: in general terms,

- ° what does Gutt see as significant conceptual consequences of his work?

Needless to say, the framework for this talk will be Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory of verbal communication, which was sketched in yesterday's contribution by Melinda Sinclair. Within

that framework, then, I will be presenting a handful --- and I do mean 'a *strictly* limited selection' --- of specific features of Gutt's work on translation. In addition, if time allows, I will mention a handful of its more general features as well.

(One final prefatory remark. I apologise to those of you who have already made the acquaintance of Gutt's book on translation. Perhaps you feel that you've been brought here under false pretences! If you would prefer to spend the next forty minutes elsewhere, pursuing some other interest, then of course you are more than welcome to exercise that option, and "no hard feelings".)

2 A few specific features: when loss in translation is our common lot

2.1 The argumentative setting

In the fourth chapter of his book Gutt focuses on a familiar idea: the requirement (or demand) that a translation "should communicate the meaning of the original accurately and clearly to the readers of the translation" (1991:66). (For reasons which I will come to presently, I find it useful to label this *the AIM requirement*.) And here is the question which Gutt (1991:69) sets out to answer in his chapter four:

° can the AIM requirement serve as "the basis of an explicit general theory of translation?"

(For convenient reference, if not for elegance, allow me to label this *the "proper basis" question*.)

The assumed answer to this question has been "yes" in at least two (sets of) approaches to translation; these are the dynamic equivalence approach, developed most noticeably by Nida, and the idiomatic approaches developed by Beekman and Callow and by Larson. In his discussion of the "proper basis" question Gutt accordingly pays special attention to these approaches.

He (1991:93-94) makes it abundantly clear, moreover, that what he is "interested in here is not a theory that will work well only in the less problematic situations"; what he is interested in is "an account of translation in general". At the end of an analysis running over some twenty pages, Gutt (1991:94) comes to the conclusion that "*as general theories of translation the dynamic equivalence approach and the idiomatic approaches*" (Gutt's own emphasis) fail to provide "evidence that the goals they have set for translation are achievable in principle in both primary and secondary communication situations" (Gutt's distinction between primary and secondary communication situations is outlined and briefly illustrated in Handout 3). Gutt (1991:94) moreover, in his conclusion, offers to pinpoint the reasons why these approaches fail to provide such evidence: their views of linguistic communication and of textual meaning are inadequate. Let me pause to emphasize the two "phenomena" involved here. One is the vast phenomenon of linguistic, or if you like, *verbal communication*. The other is the marginally less vast phenomenon of *textual meaning*.

So what, you may be wondering, are the relevance theoretic alternatives to these allegedly inadequate views? And what is it that makes these relevance theoretic alternatives more adequate?

Well, unfortunately the analysis that leads Gutt to the conclusion which I have just quoted from is both too long and too technical to be presented in a talk such as this. That analysis involves, however, several ideas which have a claim on our attention here today. Not only are these ideas of direct concern to translators. They also, fortunately, are ideas which will allow us to make their initial acquaintance even if we meet them in relative isolation from the overall argument in Gutt's chapter four. In the rest of my talk I will try to help you gain a "nodding acquaintance" of this sort with one or perhaps (if time allows) two of those ideas. These ideas, as it happens, are the relevance theoretic views of the two phenomena which I emphasized a minute ago: the vast phenomenon of textual meaning

and the even vaster phenomenon of verbal communication. I turn now to (the nature of) textual meaning.

2.2 The nature of textual meaning

2.2.1 Conveying the author-intended meaning: the content and the conceptual setting of a familiar requirement

As I have mentioned, Gutt in his chapter four focuses on the AIM requirement: the familiar-sounding requirement that a translation "should communicate the meaning of the original accurately and clearly to the readers of the translation" (1991:66). Elsewhere Gutt (1991:72) refers to the same requirement when he speaks of "approaches to translation that are committed to conveying the author-intended meaning of the original to a receptor language audience" or, more cryptically, of "any translation committed to conveying the intended original meaning". (Roughly speaking, an approach to translation is a set of ideas about translating and translations --- where *translating* refers to certain processes and/or activities which are brought to bear on certain texts in a given language, conventionally called *the source language texts*, and *translations* refers to certain texts expressed in some other language, called *the target language texts*, which are the products of those processes and/or activities. Often it will be convenient to shorten *approach to translation* to just *approach* by itself.)

I sometimes find it useful to express this requirement as an instruction to the translator. In a relatively complete, though unwieldy, version this requirement might then read as follows:

The AIM requirement (= unreduced version)

Translator, first see to it that you understand the original and its setting (for instance, its socio-historical background) well enough to identify, with at least fair certainty, the meaning which the author intended the original to convey to the source lan-

guage audience envisaged by him; then produce a target language text which will accurately and clearly convey this author-intended meaning to the target language audience envisaged by you.

And even that, all translators will agree, is merely *relatively* complete as a picture of what translators have to do to do their jobs well. A good deal less clumsy than that, but at the same time a good deal more cryptic, would be the following instructional version of the familiar requirement on which Gutt focuses his chapter four:

The AIM requirement (= first reduced version)

Translator, accurately and clearly convey to the target language readers the author-intended meaning of the original.

For this talk, however, I am going to reduce the instructional version of this requirement even further, as follows:

The AIM requirement (= second reduced version)

Translator, convey the author-intended meaning.

In all three versions of this requirement I make grateful use of Gutt's phrase *author-intended meaning*. I think it's a handy phrase, and a catchy one. It is handy, or if you like, economical, because it makes a mere seven syllables stand for (what, if only it could be properly explicated, would presumably turn out to be) a great deal of conceptual content. It's a catchy phrase, too, for at least two reasons. First reason: the three word-initial letters in the spelling of this phrase --- that's *a* for *author*, *i* for *intended*, and *m* for *meaning* --- give us an acronym, *A* plus *I* plus *M*, which we can pronounce exactly like, and as easily as, our old friend the English word *aim* (noun or verb). Second reason: so far, we have been con-

cerned with 'conveying the author-intended meaning' as a notion representing a requirement on translations; it is equally natural, however, to take this notion as representing the *goal* or the *objective* or --- wait for it --- the *aim* of a translation. From Gutt's chapter four --- where "goal", "objective" and "aim" are used interchangeably throughout (as is only natural) --- let me cite just two typical instances of this other use of "aim". Please note, though, that I am not taking a stand here on whether this other use of "aim" is theoretically sound or unsound. Here then is an instance of the noun "aim" in this other use: "... there is reason to doubt that the treatment they suggest can achieve ... the aim of ... translations that convey the 'message' of the original ..." (Gutt 1991:93). And here is an instance of the verb "aim" in this other use: "Translating must aim primarily at 'reproducing the message'." (Gutt 1991:67, quoting from Nida and Taber (1969:12).)

Now let us reconsider the content of the AIM requirement from the respective points of view of two questions. *First question:* to what extent does the AIM requirement embody a conception of translation? For instance, would it be accurate to take the AIM requirement as embodying the following conception (or, if you like, definition) of a translation?:

A target language text is a translation of a given source language text if it conveys the author-intended meaning of the latter.

No, this would be a mistake. To see why, we only need to look back to the broader conceptual setting to which the AIM requirement originally belonged: that of the dynamic equivalence approach to translation and the idiomatic approaches to translation. This is obvious from the useful generalization in which Gutt (1991:68), taking these approaches together, reminds us that

"they share the following two basic objectives: 1) a translation must convey to the receptor language audience the meaning or message of the original; and

2) it must do so in a way that is faithful, viz.
equivalent to the dynamics of the original"

("keeping in mind", Gutt is careful to add, "that there are differences in what is meant by 'dynamics'"). Clearly, to be a translation from the point of view of these approaches, a target language text must be faithful to the original not only in regard to "what" the original conveys (its content or "matter") but also in regard to "how" the original does so (its "manner"). And the point is that the AIM requirement is about the "what" only, not about the "how".

The customary logical distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions (on this, see Handout 2) sheds some welcome light here. Evidently, in terms of this distinction, the condition reflected in 1) of the quote above --- (roughly) "Translator, convey the author-intended meaning of the original" --- and the condition reflected in 2) above --- (roughly) "Translator, convey the author-intended meaning in the author-intended manner" --- are *jointly sufficient* for a translation to come about, but either of these conditions taken by itself is *merely necessary*. In sum, then: the AIM requirement embodies not a conception of translation but only (what looks like) *one, necessary but insufficient, condition for the existence of a translation.*

This brings us to my second question about the content of the AIM requirement. *Second question:* to what extent *has* its content been made, or *can* it still be made, less obscure? (Recall for a moment our capsule statement of this rather obscure content: 'translator, convey the author-intended meaning'.) This content will be or become less obscure, I take it, *only* to the extent to which progress has been or is being made in developing intellectually respectable answers to some large questions, including the following two (two interrelated questions which I will label *the interpretation question* and *the meaning question*):

The interpretation question

How, if at all, can a reader of a text know the meaning which the author intends or intended the text to convey?

The meaning question

What would be appropriate as an explicit and general meaning for the term "meaning" in this connection?

Promising progress towards intellectually respectable answers to these two and related other questions has, it seems to me, recently been made within the framework of relevance theory.

In regard to the interpretation question: it is thanks to this promising progress that Melinda Sinclair in her talk on relevance theory yesterday had illuminating things to say about the reader's cognitive environment. And about the part played by the reader's cognitive environment in the efforts, mostly successful but sometimes unsuccessful, which he has to invest in order to interpret the text and so know its author-intended meaning.

Likewise in regard to the meaning question: it is in response to the promising progress in relevance theory that, as we will see in the next part of my talk, Gutt has had to "take on board" (as they say) a distinction between 'the surface meaning' of a text and 'the bonus meanings' of a text.

Before we move on to the next part of my talk, though, do please note carefully the forms of the two phrases that have just come up. Yes, the first phrase is *the surface meaning* in the singular. But, yes, the other one is in the plural. And, no, this other phrase is not *the bogus meanings* with a *g* --- it's *the bonus meanings* with an *n*.

What, then, do these phrases *mean*? In the next part of my talk I hope to answer this, more important, question as we examine one of Gutt's example texts in some detail. This example text

will be the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew or, for short, Matthew 2.

2.2.2 R.T. France on Matthew's "surface meaning" and "bonus meanings"

2.2.2.1 Matthew 2: its importance to Gutt, its problems for the exegete, and France's approach to its interpretation

Why Matthew 2? Because Matthew 2 is used by Gutt (1991) as the main example in the overall argument of his fourth chapter --- the argument concerning the "proper basis" question. Even to New Testament scholars, however, the text of Matthew 2 presents special challenges of interpretation. Indeed, one such scholar, R.T. France, speaks, in this connection, of "a minefield littered with exegetical corpses" (cf. Gutt 1991:197 n. 5).

R.T. France himself approaches Matthew 2 in terms of communication. His approach is similar in focus, therefore, to what Gutt (1991:66) calls the "strong trend in translation theory and practice", since the 1960s, "to pay special attention to how well the translation communicates to the target audience". This concern with how well translators communicate to their target audiences has, as Gutt (1991:66) points out, "probably found its fullest development in circles" engaged in Bible translation, though of course such concern is not limited to those circles.

It will be instructive to consider the broad thrust of R.T. France's exegesis of Matthew 2. But before we try to do that, let us consider first some features of the text itself.

2.2.2.2 Some textual features of Matthew 2

For the text of Matthew 2 you may wish to refer to Handout 1. In Gutt's (1991:70) words,

"This chapter begins with a report on how some magi came to pay homage to Jesus as the new-born king of the Jews; this visit resulted in the flight of Joseph and his family to Egypt and the slaughter of infants in Bethlehem. The chapter ends with an account of how the fugitives returned from Egypt and came to live in Nazareth."

The narrative is made up of four sections, in each of which Matthew incorporates a quotation.

In the *first* section, which tells of the magi's visit, verse 6 quotes from Micah 5:1. Micah 5:1 reads as follows:

The LORD says;
"Bethlehem Ephrathah,
you are one of the smallest towns in Judah
but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel,
whose family line goes back to ancient times."

In the second line of Matthew's quotation, however, the original wording,

"you are one of the smallest towns in Judah",

undergoes a drastic revision. It is not simply that affirmation makes way for negation; Matthew's Micah, after all, is saying far more than merely,

"you are by no means one of the smallest towns of Judah".

In Matthew's hands, "one" turns into "by no means the least", "towns" turns into "cities", "smallest" turns into "leading". And so, in addressing the town of Bethlehem, Matthew's Micah tells her,

"you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah".

Insignificance has been transformed, here, into major importance; a former nonentity is now a V.I.P. (There are striking other

differences too between the wording of Micah 5 :1 and that of Matthew 2:6, but my ignorance does not allow me to comment on them.)

The *second* section of Matthew's narrative tells of the escape to Egypt. Here, verses 5-6 present a quotation from Hosea 11:1. According to the *Good News Bible*, Hosea 11:1 admits of at least two construals. One of these can be rendered into English with "call him out of Egypt"; it reads as follows:

The LORD says
"When Israel was a child, I loved him
and called him out of Egypt as my son."

The other construal can be rendered with "call him my son"; here is how it reads:

The LORD says,
"When Israel was a child, I loved him;
from the time he left Egypt, I have called him my son."

Note that in both construals the first half consists of the words "When Israel was a child, I loved him". Note, too, that in both construals the second half is rendered with "him" as the direct object of "call".

Now in Matthew 2:15 what Hosea is made to say is not fully the same as either one of the two construals we have just been looking at. Here is what Matthew's Hosea does say:

I called my Son out of Egypt.

Note how this wording selects and discards elements of both construals. For instance, it selects the construction with "call ... out of Egypt" rather than "call him my son". And in its choice of direct object it deviates from both construals; they both have "him" as the direct object, but in Matthew's wording the direct object is "my son". Again, although the clause "When Israel was a child, I loved him" is common to the two construals, Matthew's wording discards it completely.

The *third* section of Matthew's narrative tells of Herod's killing of the children, and here verse 7 quotes (virtually) verbatim from Jeremiah 31:15, which reads as follows:

The LORD says,
"A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of bitter weeping.
Rachel is crying for her children;
they are gone,
and she refuses to be comforted."

(The only deviations from the original wording are that the last two clauses are switched, that *and* is dropped, and that the last line of verse now begins with the conjunction *for*. Obviously, however, these changes merely make explicit the implicit causal reading of the original last two lines.)

In the *final* section of Matthew 2, which describes the return from Egypt, verse 23 contains the following quotation:

He will be called a Nazarene.

This is from some unidentified source (Gutt 1991:70).

So, looking back for a moment to recap, let us note that Matthew's first quotation contains at least one line which says virtually the opposite of the original, that his second quotation comes closer to being a verbatim version of the original, and that the third quotation virtually *is* a verbatim one. (Not knowing the specific source of the fourth quotation, we obviously have no way of judging to what extent it is faithful or free.)

We are now in a position to begin to see what Gutt (1991:70) means when he asserts that Matthew in his chapter two does not just report the events which he narrates. Rather, what Matthew does is to combine these events --- as Gutt (1991:70) puts it --- "with copious allusions to and quotations from the Old Testament, sometimes adapting the quotations in certain ways". This, Gutt in effect suggests, is to be taken as evidence about Matthew's authorial intention. Somewhat negatively, this evidence

indicates according to Gutt (1991:70) that Matthew intended to convey, not "just a report of certain events", but "something more". But positively, then, "what did [Matthew --- W.K.W.] intend to communicate?" (Gutt 1991:70). It is for an answer to this question that Gutt turns to R.T. France's exegesis of Matthew 2.

2.2.2.3 The broad thrust of France's exegesis

This is not the talk, however, and certainly I am not the speaker, to even begin to do justice to France's careful and erudite argumentation. I will confine myself to the broad thrust of France's exegetical conclusions. Moreover, I will confine myself to listing some items indicative of that broad thrust.

First item: Matthew wrote his gospel for a Jewish Christian readership (Gutt 1991:70, quoting from France (1981:249)).

Second item: to such readers, the conventional Jewish expectations about the Messiah as a king and saviour of his people meant that Jesus' association with the insignificant village of Nazareth was a cause for embarrassment (Gutt 1991:70-71, quoting from France (1981:249); cf. also Gutt 1991:76). Theologically speaking, that is, to Matthew's envisaged readership of Jewish Christians the obscure Galilean background of Jesus posed a problem of apologetics (which is to say, a problem in "the defence and rational justification of Christianity" (*Collins Dictionary of the English Language*)).

Third item: the four-part structure of the text of Matthew 2 is "governed" by an answer to this problem --- that is to say, by

"the apologetic point ... that Jesus' obscure Galilean background was not a cause for embarrassment, but rather the end-result of a series of divinely directed movements, beginning as orthodox belief demanded in Bethlehem, but culminating in Nazareth, and that for each stage of this process there was appropriate scriptural authority" (France 1981:249, as quoted by Gutt (1991:70-71)).

In one place France (1981:249) describes this as "[an] ... essentially apologetic ... message"; mostly, however, he refers to it as "the surface meaning".

Fourth item: the surface meaning of Matthew 2 is to be distinguished from its bonus meanings. The surface meaning, that is, is a meaning "which any reasonably intelligent reader", "even the most uninstructed", "might be expected to grasp"; by contrast, a bonus meaning is a meaning which is accessible only to "those who are more 'sharp-eyed', or better instructed in Old Testament scripture" (France 1981:241, 249, as quoted by Gutt (1991:70-71)). For instance, one or more bonus meanings were to be had from Matthew 2, France (1981:250, quoted by Gutt (1991:71)) suggests, according as readers were well enough instructed in Old Testament scripture to be able to do one or more of the following:

- to recognise Matthew's "deliberate mistakes" in his quotation of Micah 5:1, including the revision of Bethlehem's status,
- to spot Matthew's "sophisticated creation of the Nazarene text from a minor theme of Old Testament prophecy",
- to remember the exilic setting of Jeremiah 31:15, and
- to recollect that the son referred to in the original Hosea 11:1 had been Israel.

Fifth item: The text of Matthew 2 is far, however, from being a unique instance in this regard; essentially the same distinction between surface meaning and bonus meanings holds good more widely. Indeed, adducing as a typical further case in point the characteristic differences between children's own experience of children's classics and adults' interpretation of such texts, France (1981:241) argues for the general validity of (as Gutt 1991:72 puts it) "[the] view of the intended 'message' of a text [as] being layered, perhaps even open-ended". (Incidentally, in

the paragraph just quoted from, as elsewhere in his fourth chapter (e.g. pp. 68 and 69), Gutt uses *message* and *meaning* as imprecise and interchangeable labels.) I will refer to this view of France's as the "*meaning is layered*" view. I will suggest a paraphrase of this view presently. For the moment, however, what is important is that in France's opinion the "meaning is layered" view makes unsurprising three further, interconnected, exegetical conclusions of his (1981:241, as quoted by Gutt (1991:71-72)).

First further conclusion:

"what any given reader will find in a chapter like Matthew 2 will vary with his exegetical background".

Second further conclusion:

"... Matthew would not necessarily have found this [variability in readers' interpretation of his text --- W.K.W.] regrettable ..."

Third further conclusion:

"[Rather, Matthew --- W.K.W.] ... was deliberately composing a chapter rich in potential exegetical bonuses, so that the more fully a reader shared the religious traditions and scriptural erudition of the author, the more he was likely to derive from his reading, while at the same time there was a surface meaning sufficiently uncomplicated for even the most naïve reader to follow it."

2.2.3 A problem: the loss of Matthew's surface meaning in existing English translations

2.2.3.1 Splitting "meaning" into "surface" and "bonus"

In the following statement and definitions, I tentatively paraphrase France's view of textual meaning:

France's "meaning is layered" view

Statement: In principle it is possible for a text to have two layers of author-intended meaning, namely (i) a surface meaning and (ii) one or more, or even indefinitely many, bonus meanings.

Definitions: In terms of this view

--- "the surface meaning" means 'a meaning intended by the author to be accessible to even the most naïve of his envisaged readers' and

--- "bonus meanings" means 'meanings intended by the author to be accessible, not to his most naïve readers, but rather to his envisaged other readers, and this to the extent to which these other readers share with the author the cultural traditions and/or the bodies of learning envisaged by him'.

To Gutt this "meaning is layered" view of France's seems doubly deserving. On the one hand, as France himself notes (with reference to children's classics and their differing interpretations by children and by adults, respectively (France 1981:241, as quoted by Gutt (1991:71)), this view "agrees with our everyday use of language". On the other hand, this view is "quite consistent with relevance theory: (Gutt 1991:72). This latter point is especially interesting, because in Gutt's opinion such compatibility with relevance theory is highly significant: it means very considerable support for the "meaning is layered" view. Why? Not merely because relevance theory has from early on appealed to Gutt (1991:vii) by virtue of its cognitive basis, its comprehensiveness and its explicitness, but also because in his investigations as a "translation theorist" Gutt has found relevance theory to be a theory with considerable explanatory power (Gutt 1991: passim, e.g. 20-21, 65, 164, 188, 190).

And so, since he holds the "meaning is layered" view to be highly acceptable, Gutt feels himself entitled to bring this view into his argument concerning the "proper basis" question. He does more, of course, than merely bring in the "meaning is layered"

view here as an acceptable and therefore accepted view. He also concerns himself (more or less expressly) with implications or, if you like, consequences which this view has within this argumentative setting.

In particular Gutt (1991), in the first three full paragraphs of his page 72, is concerned with implications which the "meaning is layered" view has at two distinct, though inter-related, levels. Firstly, there is the level of different approaches to translation. Examples of these, as noted in 2.2.2.1 above, are the dynamic equivalence approach of Nida and Taber, the idiomatic approach of Beekman and Callow, and the idiomatic approach of Larson. In the first full paragraph of his page 72, Gutt accordingly speaks of

"approaches to translation which are committed to conveying the author-intended meaning of the original to a receptor language audience."

Secondly, there is the level of the individual translations which are produced within a particular approach to translation. For instance, in the second full paragraph of his page 72 Gutt (1991) refers to

"any translation [he means 'of Matthew 2' --- W.K.W.] committed to conveying the intended original meaning".

And in the third full paragraph on his page 72, Gutt speaks of

"an English translation of this chapter [again he means 'of Matthew 2' --- W.K.W.]",

"[the English translation of this chapter --- W.K.W.] from the 'Good News Bible'", and also

"all regular English translations of this chapter".

(These two levels might be labelled *the approaches level* and *the translations level*, respectively.) Accordingly we may say that Gutt (1991:72, the first three full paragraphs) is concerned

- with an implication which the "meaning is layered" view has at the level of distinct approaches to translation and
- with an implication which, *as a result*, the "meaning is layered" view has at the level of the individual translations produced within a particular approach to translation.

(These two implications might be labelled, correspondingly, the *approaches level implication* and the *translations level implication*.)

In dealing with the implication at the approaches level Gutt (1991:72), it seems to me, relies on essentially the following reasoning:

Because the "meaning is layered" view is so deserving, therefore any approach which to date has held that a translation should convey the author-intended meaning of the original will in future have to hold that a translation should *both* (i) convey the author-intended surface meaning of the original *and* (ii) convey the author-intended bonus meanings of the original.

In other words, the notion of 'author-intended meaning' assumed in the AIM requirement has to be brought into line with the view that '{textual} meaning is layered'. A convenient way to represent this, it would seem, is to reword the AIM requirement to read as follows:

The AIM requirement (= "layered" version)

Translator,

- (i) convey the author-intended surface meaning and
- (ii) convey the author-intended (bonus meaning or) bonus meanings.

So in its "layered" version the AIM requirement imposes two conditions --- one condition for each of the two layers of textual

meaning. (For obvious reasons, we can label these conditions *the surface condition* and *the bonus condition*, respectively.)

Let me emphasize something here: the AIM requirement in its "layered" version requires the translator to meet *both* of two conditions. Accordingly we can make use here again of the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions. In terms of this distinction, the "surface" condition and the bonus condition are jointly sufficient for a translation to meet the layered AIM requirement, but either of these conditions taken by itself is merely necessary.

2.2.3.2 Gutt's lethally lenient reading of the layered AIM requirement

Let's recap for a moment. The author-intended meaning of a text consists of an author-intended *surface* meaning *and* one or more author-intended *bonus* meanings. That is, very roughly, the gist of the "meaning is layered" view. And the point we have just been looking at is that this view has a certain implication or consequence at the approaches level: roughly, because in terms of this view '(textual) meaning' is split into 'surface' and 'bonus', therefore '(textual) meaning' has to be split into 'surface' and 'bonus' in the AIM requirement as well. We must now look at the point that, in its turn, this approaches level implication has a certain consequence at the level of the individual translations within an approach.

After all, consider the approaches to translation which we have in mind here. Firstly, they accept and incorporate the "layered" AIM requirement. Secondly, in terms of these approaches, R.T. France's expert and independently arrived at interpretation of Matthew 2 is of precisely the right sort. So, in terms of these approaches: what is implied concerning the success requirements for a translation of Matthew 21? To make the point more specific and concrete, let us put this question with reference to existing English translations:

The "translations" question

What requirement does R.T. France's interpretation of the original text of Matthew 2, correctly a "layered" interpretation, imply as a requirement which any existing English translation of Matthew 2 must meet in order to be successful?

The reasoning which one would expect here is necessarily something like the following:

Because the original text of Matthew 2 has an interpretation essentially like that presented by R.T. France, therefore any existing English translation of Matthew 2 must, to be successful, (i) convey the author-intended surface meaning of the original as described in France's interpretation and (ii) convey the author-intended bonus meanings as described in France's interpretation.

The obviously warranted conclusion here, in other words, is the conclusion that any existing English translation of Matthew 2 has to meet *both* the surface condition *and* the bonus condition (of the "layered" AIM requirement). Logically speaking, that is, both of these are necessary conditions.

Gutt (1991:72) seems willing, however, to waive the bonus condition and to insist on (the satisfaction of) the surface condition only --- and I quote:

"Assuming that France's analysis is essentially right, it would only seem reasonable to expect that any translation [of Matthew 2 --- W.K.W.] committed to conveying the intended original meaning should convey to the receptor language audience at least Matthew's 'surface meaning', that is, the main point of this passage, which he intended to convey to all members of his original audience ..."

Gutt's (seeming) leniency in enforcing the "layered" AIM requirement is evident from his choice of the words "it would only seem reasonable" and "should convey to the receptor language audience

at least Matthew's 'surface meaning'. And his (seeming) leniency consists in his (seeming) waiver of what is, properly speaking, a necessary condition for the existence of a translation.

It is in the very next two sentences after his "at least" remark that Gutt (1991:72) speaks of "an English translation" of Matthew 2 and of "all regular English translations" of Matthew 2:

"However, it seems safe to say that there are few, if any, English readers who would naturally derive this 'surface meaning' from an English translation of this chapter --- not even from the 'Good News Bible' translation, though this was produced on the principles of dynamic equivalence. Though all regular English translations of this chapter include all the events as well the Old Testament quotations and allusions, they do not seem to convey Matthew's main point here."

And as is entirely appropriate in this connection, Gutt (1991:72) here poses the question, "How can this be?"

A little more about this presently. First, however, we must pause to glance at how lethal Gutt's seeming leniency turns out to be within the overall argument of his chapter four. To do so, let's review Gutt's train of thought in reverse:

°No existing English translation of Matthew 2 succeeds in conveying to its English readers the author-intended surface meaning of the original.

°That is, no existing English translation of Matthew 2 meets the surface condition of the ("layered") AIM requirement.

°But the surface condition constitutes no more than a single necessary condition for the existence of a translation in terms of the ("layered") AIM requirement.

°Therefore, no existing English translation of Matthew 2 is able to meet the ("layered") AIM requirement.

°Therefore the ("layered") AIM requirement cannot be the basis for an explicit general theory of translation.

2.3 The nature of verbal communication

In the last paragraph but one, we noted Gutt's question, "How can this be?". Let's reconsider this question in its setting of immediate co-texts to the left and to the right:

"Though all regular English translations of this chapter [that's Matthew 2, of course --- W.K.W.] include all the events as well as the Old Testament quotations and allusions, they do not seem to convey Matthew's main point here. How can this be? To understand this problem we need to look more closely at the nature of communication" (Gutt 1991:72).

For this unsuccess of existing English translations of Matthew 2, Gutt offers an interesting and, I think, worthwhile explanation in terms of the relevance theory of human communication and, specifically, of verbal communication. In this explanation a central part is played by Sperber and Wilson's concepts of 'cognitive environment' and 'context'.

Non-technically, an individual's cognitive environment is his or her assumptions about the world, and the context of an utterance is that assumption (or those assumptions) which the hearer of the utterance uses as the premise or premises in interpreting the utterance (Gutt 1991:25).

In the case of Matthew 2, as we noted in 2.2.2.3 above, France makes the point that

"the more fully a reader shared the religious traditions and scriptural erudition of the author, the more he was likely to derive from his reading."

France's reference here to religious traditions and scriptural erudition is in fact a reference to the cognitive environment of the author and of the readers whom the author had in mind. Gutt

(1991:74) enlarges on this in the following terms:

"if the audience for whom Matthew wrote was a Jewish-Christian audience, they would first of all have had a fair knowledge of the Old Testament, and secondly they would have had to grapple with the problem that Jesus had come to be known as 'Jesus of Nazareth': how could a 'Jesus of Nazareth' be the expected Messiah when it was common knowledge that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem?

...

"To an audience vexed by this problem it must have been easy to infer what Matthew intended to convey by this section of the text: it shows clearly that Jesus was, in fact, born in Bethlehem and also that, as France pointed out, the fact that he came to live in Nazareth later on was not a mistake, but the result of a succession of divinely guided events ..."

By contrast, as Gutt (1991:75) goes on to explain,

"it is not surprising that contemporary English readers who may have little knowledge of the Old Testament and who would see no problem in the association of Jesus with Nazareth would fail to get Matthew's main point here ..."

Why? Because contemporary English readers lack "the right, that is, speaker-envisaged, contextual assumptions" (Gutt 1991:73, 75).

Lack of time makes it quite impossible to take up the relevance theoretic detail of Gutt's answer here, unfortunately. Melinda Sinclair and I have however drawn up a short list of useful references to the literature, and we will be more than happy to let you have a copy of that if you are interested. Which I hope you are!

One last remark, though, is very much to the point here. The problem of a contextual mismatch --- that is, a mismatch between the speaker's or writer's intended (= envisaged) contextual assumptions and the contextual assumptions actually brought to bear by the audience or reader(s) --- is not limited to "the translation of written documents from ancient times" (Gutt 1991:75). To illustrate this, Gutt (1991:75) makes use of an

example described by Brislin (1978:205):

"At a meeting held recently in Japan, an American was discussing two alternative proposals with his colleagues, all of whom were native speakers of Japanese. The American was well schooled in the Japanese language and was, indeed, often called 'fluent' by those around him. At this meeting, proposal A was contrasted to proposal B, and a consensus was reached about future action, and the meeting then dismissed. Upon leaving the room the American commented, 'I think the group made a wise choice in accepting proposal A.' A Japanese colleague, however, noted, 'But proposal B was the group's choice.' The American continued: 'But I heard people say that proposal A was better.' The Japanese colleague concluded, 'Ah, you listened to the words but not to the pauses between the words.'"

And here is Gutt's (1991:75) diagnosis of this instance of communicative failure:

"In this instance communication was not only between contemporaries, but even face to face, and yet contextual mismatches due to cross-cultural differences caused misunderstanding ..."

3. A few general features: conceptual consequences of Gutt's findings

At the start of my talk, I distinguished in a rough and ready way between specific and general features of Gutt's work on the theoretical foundations of translation, and promised that, if time allowed, I would indicate what Gutt himself sees as significant conceptual consequences of this work.

To do this, let me simply reflect some of Gutt's general claims. First general claim: every translator must be recognised, and must recognise himself or herself, "as a communicator addressing the [target] language audience" (Gutt 1991:189). The translator, that is, "always has an informative intention which [his or her translation] is to convey to the target language audience" (loc. cit.). Moreover, this recognition

◦ "should help to raise the often bemoaned, low status of translators as copyists" and

◦ should "prevent misunderstandings that arise from the pretense that there is a direct act of communication between the original source and the [target] language audience" (loc. cit.).

Second general claim: every translator should grasp the crucial point "that whatever he [or she] does in his [or her] translation matters primarily not because it agrees with or violates some principle or theory of translation, but because of the causal interdependence of cognitive environment, stimulus and interpretation" (loc. cit.).

Third general claim: "since the phenomena of translation can be accounted for by [a] general theory of ostensive-inferential communication, there is no need to develop a separate theory of translation. The success or failure of translations, like that of other instances of ostensive-inferential communication, depends causally on consistency with the principle of relevance" (loc. cit.).

These are some of the general claims which Gutt tentatively puts forward in the closing paragraphs of his book *Translation and relevance* (1991) --- a book in which he attempts to pinpoint "why translation theory is in a mess" and to sketch a relevance-theoretic answer to what many have seen as a pressing problem: what can be done about his mess (cf. Gutt 1991:2, quoting the title to a paper by Roger T. Bell)?

These startling claims come at the end of a book which I recommend to you because it offers a promising, even though exploratory, answer to the question, what does today's general linguistics offer the translation profession? Here in very broad terms is how Gutt (1991) answers that question: general linguistics today offers the translation profession

- °Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory as a theory aimed at explaining human cognition,
- °Sperber and Wilson's own initial application of relevance theory with a view to explaining verbal communication, and
- °Gutt's application of relevance theory with a view to explaining translation between two human languages.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Bible Society, and British and Foreign Bible Society. 1977. *Good News Bible. Today's English Version. British Usage Edition.* Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa.
- Brislin, Richard W. 1978. "Contributions to cross-cultural orientation programs and power analysis to translation/interpretation". In D. Gerver and H.W. Sinaiko (eds.) 1978:205-216. Quoted from by Gutt (1991:75).
- Copi, Irving M. 1968. *Introduction to logic.* Third edition. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- France, Richard T. 1981. "The formula-quotations of Matthew 2 and the problem of communication", *New Testament Studies* 27:233-251. Referred to by Gutt (1991:70-74).
- Gerber, David, and H. Wallace Sinaiko (eds.). 1978. *Language interpretation and communication. Proceedings of the NATO Symposium on Language and Communication, Venice, 26.9.-1.10.1977.* Plenum Press, New York.
- Gutt, Ernst-August. 1991. *Translation and relevance. Cognition and context.* London: Basil Blackwell.
- Hanks, Patrick (ed.). 1985. *Collins Dictionary of the English Language.* London: Collins.
- Nida, Eugene A., and Charles Taber. 1969. *The theory and practice of translation.* Brill: London. Referred to by Gutt (1991:66-67, 76-77).
- Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. 1986. *Relevance. Communication and cognition.* London: Basil Blackwell. Referred to by Gutt (1991:25).
- Zondervan. 1975. *Parallel New Testament in Greek and English.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers.

HANDOUT 1

Visitors from the East

2 Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judaea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards, some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. 4 He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

5 "In the town of Bethlehem in Judaea," they answered. "For this is what the prophet wrote:

6 'Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
you are by no means the least of the
leading cities of Judah;
for from you will come a leader
who will guide my people Israel.'"

7 So Herod called the visitors from the east to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: "Go and make a careful search for the child, and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him."

9-10 And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the east. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 11 They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

12 Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

The Escape to Egypt

13 After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt and stay there until I tell you to leave."

14 Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left during the night for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until Herod died. This was done to make what the Lord had said through the prophet come true, "I called my Son out of Egypt."

The Killing of the Children

16 When Herod realized that the visitors from the east had tricked him, he was furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood who were two years old and younger - this was done in accordance with what he had learned

from the visitors about the time when the star had appeared.
17 In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true:
18 "A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of bitter weeping.
Rachel is crying for her children;
she refuses to be comforted,
for they are dead."

The Return from Egypt

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went back to Israel.
22 But when Joseph heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judaea, he was afraid to go there. He was given more instructions in a dream, so he went to the province of Galilee 23 and made his home in a town named Nazareth. And so what the prophets had said came true: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Matthew 2 (Good News Bible. Today's English Version. British usage ed. 1976)

HANDOUT 2

'NECESSARY CONDITIONS' VERSUS 'SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS'

With reference to the occurrence of events in nature Copi (1968: 322) lucidly spells out this customary logical distinction as follows:

"It is a fundamental axiom in the study of nature that events do not just happen, but occur only under certain conditions. It is customary to distinguish between necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of an event. A *necessary* condition for the occurrence of a specified event is a circumstance in whose absence the event cannot occur. For example, the presence of oxygen is a necessary condition for combustion to occur: if combustion occurs, then oxygen must have been present, for in the absence of oxygen there can be no combustion.

"Although it is a necessary condition, the presence of oxygen is not a sufficient condition for combustion to occur. A *sufficient* condition for the occurrence of an event is a circumstance in whose presence the event must occur. The presence of oxygen is not a sufficient condition for combustion because oxygen can be present without combustion occurring. On the other hand, for almost any substance there is some range of temperature such that *being in that range of temperature in the presence of oxygen* is a sufficient condition for combustion of that substance. It is obvious that there may be several *necessary* conditions for the occurrence of an event, and that they must all be included in the sufficient condition."

'PRIMARY COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS' VERSUS
'SECONDARY COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS'

To understand the distinction which Gutt draws between primary communication situations and secondary communication situations, it is necessary to keep in mind that in relevance theory (Gutt 1991:25):

"[t]he context of an utterance is the set of premises used in interpreting [it]' (Sperber and Wilson 1986..., p. 15). As such it is a psychological concept: 'A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world' (Sperber and Wilson 1986..., p. 15). Hence in relevance theory [the term *context* -- W.K.W.] does not refer to some part of the external environment of the communication partners, be it the text preceding or following an utterance, situational circumstances, cultural factors etc.; it rather refers to part of their 'assumptions about the world' or *cognitive environment*, as it is called ... The notion of 'cognitive environment' takes into account the various external factors but places the emphasis on the information they provide and its mental availability for the interpretation process."

In introducing his distinction between primary communication situations and secondary communication situations, Gutt (1991: 72-74) makes the following remarks *inter alia*:

"... one of the central claims of relevance theory is that human communication works by inference: the audience infers from the stimulus what the communicator intends to convey. Furthermore, ... in verbal communication the derivation of the speaker-intended interpretation depends not only on correct decoding, but just as much on the use of the right, that is, speaker-intended, contextual information.

"Thus the sentence 'We are about to close', said to you by a shop assistant as you try to enter, would normally be taken to suggest that you should not come in. However, if that shop assistant were your

friend with whom you had planned to go out for the evening, it would more likely be intended to suggest to you that you should wait for him since he would be shortly with you. The meaning available from decoding would be the same in both instances --- the difference in interpretation would be due to the difference [between the two sets of --- W.K.W.] contextual information used in the interpretation process.

"It follows that for communication to be successful [a certain condition has to be met: --- W.K.W.] the text or utterance produced must be inferentially combined with the right, that is, speaker-envisaged, contextual assumptions. Let us call communication situations where this condition is fulfilled *primary communication situations*. However, it can happen --- for various reasons --- that in interpreting a text an audience may fail to use the contextual assumptions intended by the communicator and perhaps use others instead. [Situations in which this does happen --- W.K.W.] we shall refer to as *secondary communication situations* ..."

Gutt (1991:73) goes on to emphasize that most secondary communication situations lead to misinterpretations. He (1991:74) likewise emphasizes the nature of the reason for such misinterpretations:

"they arise from a mismatch in context: a given utterance is interpreted against a context different from the one intended by the communicator."

Furthermore he (1991:74) points out that

"[t]here is a wide range of secondary communication situations: they begin with everyday misunderstandings that occur because the person addressed, for one reason or another, did not use the contextual assumptions envisaged by the communicator; they extend all the way to the problem of misinterpretations of historical documents or works of literature that originated in settings different from our own."