

Optimal Equivalence: A Theory for Bible Translation  
James D Price

Reviewed by  
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Professor Price's work combines generative transformational grammar and text linguistics, with detailed computer analysis. I personally do not know any work quite like it.

Professor Price's work advances the latest linguistic analysis of Hebrew grammar. It follows the recent linguistic research of Zellig Harris, the noted Semitist and linguist, and Noam Chomsky, his famous student and professor of linguistics at MIT, and their generative/transformational approach to language and grammar. It also follows the latest research into linguistic approaches to translation. Though Price is clearly indebted to scholars, such as Eugene Nida, John Beekman, John Callow, Dan Sperber, Deidre Wilson, and Ernest-August Gutt, among many others, he advances a new linguistic theory of translation, first proposed by Price himself in 1987, called optimal equivalence. This contrasts with other well-known linguistic theories, such as dynamic equivalence, functional equivalence, meaning-based theory, and relevance theory. Price's work and theory is clearly within mainstream scholarly linguistic theory for translation and analysis of Hebrew texts, but his work is not a simple restating of one or all of these other theories. His work seeks to demonstrate his own theory, optimal equivalence, through formal notations and defined procedures. In other words, he explains, demonstrates, and tests optimal equivalence, based on generative/transformational grammar and text linguist model. Price's work, therefore, is practical, not just theoretical.

Although the work has a practical goal ultimately, it is not a work for the general scholar or student. It is a technical work for experts Hebraists who use linguistic models and for experts in translation who use linguistic models. Moreover, the work has another important use in that it provides a model, not only for translation, but also for a linguistic analysis of the text. This will be helpful for all exegetes and interpreters of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament who use linguistic approaches.

While the work is technical, Price makes the work accessible to the general scholar and student with his helpful appendices. Here Price explains his generative/transformational approach and his text-linguistic approach by applying them to English. Moreover, in other appendices Price applies his work to specific grammatical forms and issues in Hebrew grammar, making the work more usable and more valuable to the general reader. Although the work will be most valuable to the specialist, the generalist will also find important uses for the work.

Price's work, in summary, is a meticulous, highly nuanced linguistic analysis that furnishes two primary contributions. First, it provides a linguistic model for the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Second, it provides a linguistic model for analyzing and interpreting the Hebrew Old Testament. In short, it is a translation manual, grammar, and exegesis textbook in one work. It is an important work for the linguistic model, the dominate model in Biblical Hebrew studies today. This work will be appreciated by many and should be read by those who follow and apply linguistic approaches to Hebrew. This is a serious work that should be published.