

What is a Translation?

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The diversity of definitions of translation presented in numerous books and articles during the last thirty years reveals a wide difference of opinion both on the nature of translation and on methods of translating, but also reflects a certain convergence towards a systematic approach to theory and practice.

One of the still most frequently quoted definitions is that proposed in 1959 by the American missionary linguist Eugene Nida:

"Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style." (1959:19).

This definition allows leeway for the concept of "dynamic equivalence" expounded in his *Toward a Science of Translating*, a concept appropriate to Nida's objective of producing "the closest natural equivalent to the source language message", a rendering in which "the focus of attention is directed, not so much toward the source message as toward receptor response.". (1964: 166).

A comparable emphasis on reader reception is also apparent in the definition given by Jampelt in *Die Übersetzung naturwissenschaftlicher und technischer Literatur*:

"Translation is not a transfer of lexical forms or content but a reconstruction or recasting of the patterns in original texts." (1961:66).

Like Nida, Jampelt adheres to the reader-oriented "principle of similar effect" (p. 177) and more or less parallel terms of reference are discernible in the definition by Jager in *Translation und Translations-linguistik*:

"Translation is essentially a means of achieving communication so applied as to ensure by procedures of linguistic delimitation that the communicative function of a given text in language LA is retained in the process of transcoding into LB so that LA-text and LB-text are communicationally equivalent." (1975:36)

The term "Translate", introduced by Kade and also use by Jager to refer to a target language rendering produced either by interpreting or by translating, is adopted by Reiss and Vermeer and used in a definition which, if nothing else, is succinct:

"A Translat can be described as a trasnmitted complex of information derived from a transmitted complex of information. (1984:19)

Other recent definitions are perhaps more indicative of the trend toward a systematic approach:-

- “Translation is a phased process comprising two basic phases: an analysis phase in which the translator analyses the stylistic and semantic aspects of the source language text, and a reformulation phase, in which the translator reproduces in the target language, with optimal implementation of the requirements of communicative equivalence, the stylistic and semantic aspects of the source language text.” Wilss in *Ubersetzungswissenschaft - Problem und Methoden* (p. 72)
- “The act of translating is guided by several sets of strategies which respond to the directives within the text. One set accounts for the systemic differences the two languages involved. A second set depends on the type of language use found in an individual text. A third set applies to systematic instructions for selecting equivalent items within their relevant contexts.” de Beaugrande in *Factors in a Theory of Poetic Translation* (p. 13)
- “Translation can be defined as an operation in which, firstly, the meaning of linguistic signs in a message is interpreted in terms of relevance to the intent concretized in this message, and secondly, the given message is integrally reconstituted with the sign of another language.” Delisle *L'analyse du discours comme methode de traduction* (p. 68)
- “Translation is the replacement of a text in the source language by a semantically and pragmatically equivalent text in the target language.” House in *A Model For Translation Quality Assessment* (p. 29)

Just as there are similarities and differences in these definitions, the various theories associated with these definitions which are representative of current trends, reflect distinct divergences and equally evident convergence of viewpoints. With the exception of Jager and House, the authors of these definitions place translation in reader-oriented and/or genre-oriented perspectives.

As the phrasing of this definition might suggest, Jager's theorizing is aimed not at a directly applicable methodology but at the construction of abstract models of hypothetical equivalence which are, in any case, lexically based and offer little or no prospect of any measure of applicability

By contrast, although it is not immediately apparent in her definition, House proposes a model comprising a set of sociolinguistic guidelines for the assessment of translations and for the actual process of translating. On various counts the validity of the model may be questioned, but House does give examples of the application of the hypotheses on which the model is based, a welcome precedent in the field of translation theory

In the preface to *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) Nida states that the scope of the book is all-inclusive, but Nida's main concern is with the production of “reader-oriented” renderings of Biblical texts in three versions for each target language speech community - one version of literary status for the cultured section of the given speech community, one for the unlettered section, and one for liturgical purposes. The translation method proposed by Nida consists of the reduction of individual sentences, so called “near kernel sentences”, more or less as in the initial phase of Chomskyan theory

Although Jumpelt deals only with texts on technical or scientific subjects, his objective is also to provide renderings considered acceptable to target language readers, and so formulated as to have on the reader the same effect as a text with the same content written in the reader's native language. (p. 177) Noting that the style of texts on technical and scientific subjects often leaves much to be desired, Jumpelt insists that "form defects" must be set aright in target language renderings. (p. 40)

Whilst proceeding from a completely different standpoint, Wills, in proposing a translation method based on text analysis in terms of syntactic, semantic, and textpragmatic (or stylistic) dimensions, also recommends that ill-written non-literary source texts should be editorially modified in the process of translation so as to allow more readable target language renderings (p. 165).

The reader is also given prominence in de Beaugrande's *Factors in a Theory of Poetic Translation* on the grounds that translating is a process paralleling the reading process, and that "when a translation is evaluated the most relevant question is whether the translation is actually suited to represent a literary work to a foreign reader" (p. 28)

This reader-oriented or "equivalent response" concept of translation is criticized by House who points, with particular reference to Nida and Taber (1969), to the absence of any effective procedure for determining reader response or for analysis of the source text. (1977:8-20)

An even more trenchant criticism of Nida is made by Meschonnic¹² who comments that "this 'science of translation' is ideologically, not scientifically based. . . it leads to an ideological distortion of the Bible and it is so devised as to justify each and every sort of distortion." *Pour la poetique II* (pp. 328-9)

Like the reader-oriented approach, the genre-oriented approach is a common denominator for a range of terminological and conceptual diversity. Jumpelt considers that stylistic defects in source texts should be eliminated in target language renderings for the benefit of the reader, but at the same time asserts that "the text type is the factor determining all criteria." (p. 24) Wills proposes a semiotic-based general methodology, but makes methodological distinctions between literary, scientific and biblical texts. (p. 155) De Beaugrande, although rejecting the classical literary/non-literary dichotomy (pp. 16-17), ascribes an exclusive status to "poetic texts" as texts characterized by "non-ordinary use of language" (p. 18 et passim), but gives precedence to assumed reader response. (p. 28 et passim) Delisle uses the term "pragmatic" to categorize "pragmatic texts" as a genre distinct from literary and biblical texts by reason of being specifically informative and instructive (pp. 22-24), whereas Wills used the term "pragmatic" as a synonym for "stylistic"

It would seem, given the degree of convergence, that the criticism of the reader-oriented approach could also largely apply to the genre-oriented approach in its various guises.

The genre-oriented approach has been expounded at some length by Katharina Reiss in booklets and articles. (1976, 1978) Taking Bühler's three-category model (the triad of expression, appeal, and reference or representation), Reiss proposes a text classification comprising three categories: *informative texts* (author focus) translated so as to re-express the content; *expressive texts* (author focus) to be translated on the same aesthetic level; and *motivating texts* (persuasion focus) to be translated so as to ensure the same evocative effect — a classification that is strikingly similar to that suggested in 1953 by Fedorov with the prescribed criteria of correspondence (of content) for scientific and technical texts; identical alignment for political and polemic texts; and integration of form and content for literary texts. While conceding in *Texttyp und Übersetzungsmethode* (p. 19), the vagueness of any dividing line between genres and the variability of "communicative function" in individual texts, Reiss claims that correlation of text type and specified norms constitutes a determining factor in translation procedure.

In *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, written in collaboration with Hans J. Vermeer, the earlier argument is extended and enlarged and couple with equal if not greater emphasis to the "reader response" approach. Without prejudice to the genre-oriented approach, Reiss and Vermeer maintain that the purpose to be fulfilled by a target language rendering of any given source text determines decisions as to what will be included in the target language rendering and how the target language rendering is formulated (p. 95 et passim). If "the target language rendering of a technical text written in the source language for experts is also intended for experts there would be an equivalence between the source text and the target language rendering, [and] if a target language rendering of the same text is intended for non-experts the rendering will be so formulated as to be understandable for this group", in this case "the Translate is adequate", it is a rendering "syntactically, semantically and pragmatically appropriate to the specified reader group." (p. 137)

With these pronouncements, reminiscent of Jumpsel's recommended interlingual emendation, Reiss and Vermeer are in effect repeating what Wilss states in commending, without any explicatory justification, the Nida/Taber concept of "dynamic equivalence": [the application of the principles established by Nida and Taber] shows that different categories of texts require different methods of translation. . . and also require different norms of equivalence." (1977:155).

As in earlier publications, Reiss advocates a classification of texts that disregards the overlapping of categories - an omission noted by Wilss (1977:144). Besides, as House points out (1977:23) the differentiation of text types presupposes a procedure of text analysis, but nowhere does Reiss suggest any such analysis. Consequently, as de Beau grande observes, "Reiss fails to provide any comprehensive criteria for evaluating transla-

tions - the basis is too narrow" (1978 - 122)

Both the reader-oriented and genre-oriented approaches not only fail to recognize the relevance of the structure of, and references in, the source text to the linguistic and extralingual conventions of the speech community in whose language it is written, but also disregard the semantic implications of the form features of the source text. The text, or section of the text, cited without source by Wilss (1977:165) as an example of stylistic ineptitude requiring "reorganization by interlingual paraphrasing" in the formulating of a target language rendering in order to provide "syntactic patterns acceptable to a target language reader" is a case in point. It is indeed a text with a minimum of cohesion and coherence, and to an extent that near opacity, due to structural convolutions and terminological ebullience, is the dominant characteristic. If this dominant characteristic is not reconveyed in the target language there is a distortion not only of the idiolectic specificity but also of the ideative significance of the form. If, however, the text is interpreted in the perspective of source culture functionality, a translation based on this interpretation will convey the explicit aspects of the source text, as can be seen from a comparison of this text and the accompanying translation (my own AB).

Betrachtet man, in Übereinstimmung mit der heute in Sprachphilosophie, Anthropologie, Soziologie und Linguistik vertretenen Auffassung, Sprache als geregelte Anweisung zu intersubjektiv erwartbarem und erwartetem sinnvollen Handeln auf der Ebene von Symbolen, so muss man 'sprachliche Bedeutung' auffassen als den subjektiv erfüllten, eine rekurrente Erwartbarkeit einlösenden informativen und kommunikativen Wirkungswert einer sprachliche Handlung (= Vertextung) in semantischen Situationen, d.h. als dem grammatischen System der Sprache entsprechenden Akt der syntaktischen Verbindung von Wortbegriffen in Texten. Sprachliche Bedeutung wird angesehen als informativ kommunikativ, emotiv, performativ oder praskriptiv erfolgreiches Resultat des systematischen Gebrauchs sprachlicher Mittel, das sich verdankt

selektiv konstituierender Dominanzbildung der Leistungsmöglichkeiten von Lexemen und der Ausnutzung von Anschlussmöglichkeiten von Sem-Kombinationen im kontextualen Verfahrensrahmen einer intentionserfüllenden syntaktischen verfahrensmatrix.

If, in accordance with the conception now finding widespread acceptance in linguistic philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, language is considered to be rule-bound instrumentarium by means of which inter-personal purposively significant utilization of symbols is effected within a framework of conventionalized patterns, linguistic meaning must consequently be regarded as a subjective actualization in semantic situations of informative and communicative latencies whereby a process takes place involving the production syntactic combinations of word concepts to constitute textuality, that is, the consummation of linguistic activity in conformity with the strictures operative in the grammatical system of the given language. Linguistic meaning is definable as the terminal informative, communicative, emotive, performative, or prescriptive result of the systematic application of linguistic resources which derives from the procedures of adapting within situation-specific limits a selectively established hierarchic stratification of the potentialities of lexemes and the compatibility angles of semic aggregates to the contextually determined contours of a syntactic instruction matrix which allow a purposive intent to be effectively implemented.

Whether or not some sort of "interlingual paraphrasing" might have elicited some clarity from this text is a moot point, and is not relevant

to the problem of establishing norms for evaluating the validity of translations. The only attempt so far to meet this need is the model proposed by House, which, contrary to the reader-oriented and genre-oriented trends, places the emphasis in translation method on the source text and source text analysis. The attempt is not wholly successful, as the component elements, derived from an earlier model by Crystal and Davy (1969), for style analysis, is more appropriate for conversation analysis than for text analysis.

Situational dimensions

A	Dimensions of Language user	1 geographical origin	marked:regional dialect unmarked:standard
		2 social class	marked:social class/non-standard unmarked:standard middle class speaker
		3 time	period-specific indication
B	Dimensions of Language use	1 medium	simple:written to be read complex:written to be spoken; written to be read as if spoken
		2 participation	simple:non-varying monologue or dialogue etc. complex:elicitation of involvement of addressee
		3 social role relationship	equality-inequality between addresser and addressee
		4 social attitude	degree of formality
		5 province	topic and form of text e.g. language of science in an essay

The model could be simplified by combining the two dimensions of language use and language user, and the divisions within these dimensions could be reduced to province, time, and geographic distribution (or subject matter, period, and region, though geographical distribution applies only

in respect of those languages distributed over two or more national boundaries). The dimensions of language user and language use are further correlated with *textual means* (degree of cohesion) repetition of statements, or impersonal tone), *syntactic means* (clause types and patterns, rhetorical questions, tense variation or invariation etc.), and *lexial means* (specialized terminology, use of adverbs, etc.), but, as with the categories proposed by Wilss, the entities House allocates to any one category could in most instances be allocated, with equal justifications, to either of the other two categories.

Nevertheless, given the shift to source text analysis, development of the model proposed by House, or the construction of models embodying the same principles, could lead to the realization of the aim of establishing generally applicable translational norms. The inadequacies of the reader-oriented and genre-oriented theorizing are due mainly, if not entirely, to the disregard of the source text as the point of departure for any hypothesis on translation method. Irrespective of whether the intention is to provide a translation or an adaptation, the prior analysis of the source text is an obvious imperative.

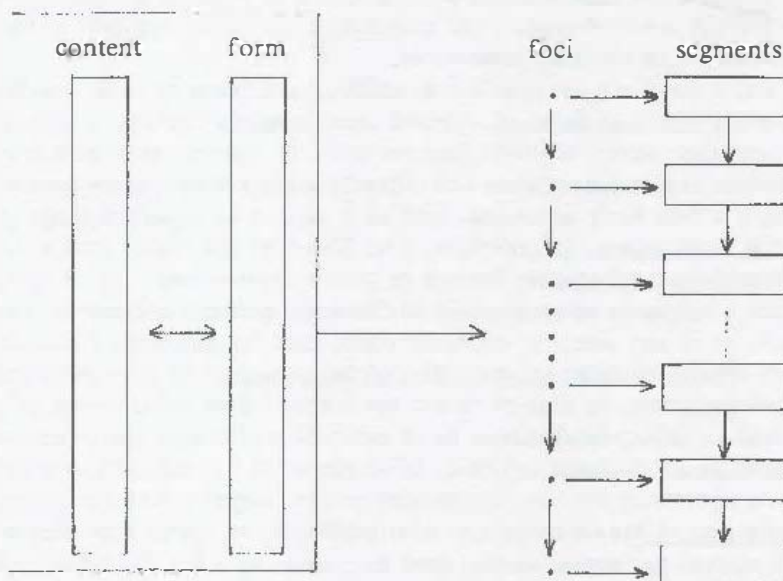
A text is essentially an intellectual artifact, and taken as such, can be assessed, in terms of form, as a period specific manifestation of source language conventions of usage, and, in terms of content, as a reflection (possibly an expression) of ideas and attitudes current in the culture pattern in which it has been produced. Just as a report or a commentary in different newspapers, for example, *The Times* or the *Daily Mirror* or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* or *Neues Deutschland*, is, in each instance, a linguistic concretization of dissimilar political and moral allegiances, so is any text, of whatever form, and irrespective of subject matter, related, perhaps emphatically, perhaps vaguely, to some or other ideative alignment. A text, or rather the form/content relationship in a text, fulfils a particular function, as an instrument of instruction or entertainment, as an aesthetic creation, or whatever, in the culture pattern of the given speech community. If a translation is envisaged as target language re-expression of the form/content relationship in the source text relative to the culture pattern of origin, then there is a basis for distinguishing between translation and adaptation.

The constituent factors of text content are the subject matter, the thematic treatment of the subject matter, and the attitude or ideology to which the treatment of the subject matter is demonstrably related by particular references and formulations. The form of a text may be explicatory, descriptive, narrative, etc. with consistently standard or spectacularly innovative formulations, or a mixture of both, and may be eminently coherent or hopelessly garbled, the various form facets being constantly linked to aspects of the content.

To be adequate for the purpose of translation, a form/content analysis will necessarily break with the lexicon/syntax bias that has obstructed the delineation of text segments beyond sentence level. The possibility

of a method for establishing suprasentential text entities has been only incidental in literary and linguistic studies (Hendricks (1967), Enkvist (1973), Lafout (1976) though without any conclusive results), and has never been considered in translation theories.

A possible solution is suggested by the concept of "predicative focus" (*novau predicatif*) introduced by Martinet (1963) as a grammatical category - in the sentence "Yesterday evening *he wrote* a number of letters" the omission of the predicative focus *he wrote* reduces the entire formulation to semantic nullity. By extension of this principle beyond sentence level to groups of formulations (sentences and phrases) a text could be seen as a succession of connected segments, each comprising a central element to which accompanying formulations are related as coordinate, subordinate, supplemental, or apposite entities. On this basis a text could be diagrammatically represented as follows:



With a model of this type it would be possible to cope with the basic relationships of form and content and part and whole and so arrive at an explicatory hypothesis of the translation process that would be a synthesis of theory and practice. Within this methodological framework it would also be possible to place problems of specialized terminology, anomalous features in texts, and period specific usage systematically in appropriate socio-linguistic contexts. Above all, this framework would provide the parameters necessary for distinguishing between an adaptation (which distorts or obscures the functionality of the source text) and translation which conveys in the target language the form/content relationship in the source text.

Appendix

Übersetzen heisst nicht, Lautform oder Inhalte austauschen, sondern solche Zuordnungen, wie sie in der Rede (d.h. in Originaltexten) gegeben sind, nachvollziehen oder neu bilden Jumpelt, R.W (1961) p. 66

Das *Wesen* der Translation besteht darin, die *Kommunikation zu sichern*, and zwar auf die soezielle, sie von der heterovalenten Sprachmittlung abgrenzenden Weise, dass der kommunikative Wert eines Textes z.B. einer Sprache LA bei der Umkodierung in beispielweise eine Sprache LB erhalten bleibt, so dass LALA-Text und LB-Text *Kommunikativ aquivalent* sind. [Das *Wesen* der Translation - wie der Kommunikation überhaupt - liegt somit im Extralinguistischen, im linguistischen (sprachlicheh) Bereich *vollzieht* sich aber die Translation: Sie ist in ihrer Erscheinungsform ein *sprachlicher* Prozess, bei dem einem Text einer Sprache LA ein Text einer Sprach LB zugeordnet wird, der Jager, Gert (1975) p. 36

[Ein Text ist sozusagen ein Informationsangebot an einen Rezipienten seitens eines Produzenten Der Translator formuliert einen Zieltext der als Text somit ebenfalls ein Informationsangebot an einen Rezipienten ist]. Ein Translat ist somit als Informationsangebot bestimmter Sorte über ein Informationsangebot darstellbar
Reiss, Katharina/Hans J Vermeer (1984) p. 19

[Übersetzen ist ein Textverarbeitungs - und Textverbalisierungsprozess, der von einem ausgangssprachlichen Text zu einem möglichst aquivalenten zielsprachlichen Verständnis der Textvorlage voraussetzt]. Übersetzen ist demnach ein in sich gegliederter Vorgang, der zwei Hauptphasen umfasst, eine Verstehensphase, in der der Übersetzer den ausgangssprachlicheh Text auf seine Sinn - und Stilintention hin analysiert, und eine sprachliche Rekonstruktionsphase, in der der Übersetzer den inhaltlich und stilistisch analysierten ausgangssprachlichen Text unter optimaler Berücksichtigung kommunikativer Aquivalenzgesichtspunkte reproduziert.
Wilss, Wolfram (1977) p. 72

L'activite traduisante se definit . . . comme l'operation qui consiste a determiner la signification pertinente des signes linguistiques en fonction d'un vouloir-dire concretise dans un message, puis a restituer ce message interfralement au moyen des signe d'une autre langue [L'wquivalence etablies au seul plan lexical ou phrastique decoule d'une analyse purement linguistique (operation de transcodage); celle qui surgit de lad dynamique d'un discours est le produit d'une interpretation (operation de traduction)].
Delisle. Jean (1980) p. 68

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