A functional typology of translations

As we have seen, different communicative functions may require different translation strategies. If the purpose of the translation is to keep the function of the text invariant, function markers often have to be adapted to target-culture standards. On the other hand, source-culture function markers that are exactly reproduced in the target text might induce the target receivers to assign a different function to the target text. Where the source text is appellative, the target text may inform about an appeal; where the source text refers to something that is familiar to its readers, the target text may refer to something unfamiliar; where the source text establishes contact in a conventional way, the target text may strike the receiver as strange.

Example: Some tourist information on Munich specialities begins with a quoted proverb: "Liebe geht durch den Magen" (literally, "Love passes through the stomach"). By definition, such a proverb reproduces a widely known experience. The sentence thus has no informative value for German readers; it is a conventional introductory peg. In the French translation, the phatic function is turned into an informative one: "'L'amour passe par l'estomac', affirme un proverbe allemand…" (literally, "'Love passes through the stomach', states a German proverb"). In the Spanish and Portuguese versions, a literal translation of the German proverb is classified as "a well-known saying". This will strike Spanish and Portuguese readers as rather odd because they have never heard this saying before. The translations thus lack intratextual coherence for these receivers.

Functionalism does not mean that the waters of Maine should generally be replaced by those of a Norwegian fjord nor that cow's eyes should become deer's eyes or whatever the target culture's favourite animal is. Functionality simply means that translators should be aware of these aspects and consider them in their decisions.

The function of a translation can be analysed from a double perspective, focussing (a) on the relationship between the target text and its audience (which can be defined in the same terms as the one holding between any original text and its readers) and (b) on the relationship between the target text and the corresponding source text. On the one hand, a translation is a text that is intended to function for the target receivers and, as such, may be intended for any communicative function. On the other, a translation is a kind of target-culture representation or substitute for a source-culture text. As such, it may carry out quite different functions with regard to the source.

A number of translation scholars have tried to systematize these considerations by establishing a typology of translations. Here, I will only mention three approaches, all of which have a clear functional orientation.

Covert and overt translations (House [1977]1981, 1997)

Juliane House ([1977]1981:188ff) distinguishes between *covert* translations, in which the source-text function is kept intact or invariant so that it aspires to the status of an original in the target culture, and *overt* or marked translations,

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which have a second-level function in that the target receiver is not addressed
directly but is made aware that the text is a translation. Subscribing to an
equivalence-based concept of translation, House links her translation types to
the nature of the source text (ST):

> In an overt translation, the ST is tied in a specific way to the source lan-
> guage community and culture; the ST is specifically directed at source
> language addressees but is also pointing beyond the source language
> community. ... A covert translation is thus a translation whose ST is not
> specifically addressed to a source culture audience, i.e. not particularly tied
> to the source language community and culture.
>
> *[1977]1981:189, 194*

Translation types based on text concepts (Reiss 1977)

Reiss ([1977]1989:115, similarly in Reiss and Vermeer [1984]2013:123ff) correlates
text concept, translation type, and translation aim. She emphasizes that any trans-
lation type (such as word-for-word translation, literal translation, or learned trans-
lation) may be justified in particular circumstances for a particular translation aim,
yet she does not conceal her conviction that the 'communicative translation' type
is the current ideal for translations. She thus seeks a target text whose linguistic
form does not betray its translational origin and serves the same communicative
purposes as the original, being at the same time its perfect equivalent syntactically,
semantically, and pragmatically (cf. Reiss and Vermeer [1984]2013:124f).

Reiss's view is taken up by Vermeer under the heading of "Translation as 'im-
itatio'" (Reiss and Vermeer [1984]2013:79). Vermeer classifies the imitating form
as the narrower concept of translation that is "conventional in our culture area
today" (Reiss and Vermeer [1984]2013:80). He quotes Toury's critical comments
on this phenomenon:

> But when one looks closer at the existing theories of translation, it im-
> mediately becomes evident that, more often than not, they do not sim-
> ply include a notion of translatability, but actually *reduce* 'translation' to
> 'translatability'. ... Moreover, their notions are only *restricted* versions of a
> *general* concept of translatability because they always have some specified
> adequacy conditions which are *postulated* as the only *proper* ones, if not dis-
> guised as the only *possible* ones.
>
> *Toury 1980:26; emphasis in the original*

Documentary vs instrumental translation (Nord 1989 and later)

Trying to combine the considerations brought forward by House and Reiss,
I have presented a more elaborate translation typology based on strictly func-
tionalist terms (see Nord 1989, less elaborately in Nord [1991]2005:79f). This
involves making a distinction between the function of the translation process and
the function of the target text as the result of this process.

In this regard, we find two basic types of translation processes. The first aims at producing in the target language a kind of *document* of (certain aspects of) a communicative interaction in which a source-culture sender communicates with a source-culture audience via the source text under source-culture conditions. The second aims at producing in the target language an *instrument* for a new communicative interaction between the source-culture sender and a target-culture audience, using (certain aspects of) the source text as a model. Accordingly, we may distinguish between 'documentary' and 'instrumental' translations (Nord 1997c).

Documentary forms of translation

The result of a documentary translation process is a text whose main function is metatextual (House's 'secondary-level' function). The target text, in this case, is a text about a text, or about one or more particular aspects of a text. There are various forms of documentary translation, all focussing on different aspects of the source text.

If a documentary translation focusses on the morphological, lexical, or syntactic features of the source-language system as present in the source text, we may speak of a word-for-word or *interlinear* translation. This kind of translation is used in comparative linguistics or in language encyclopaedias, in which the aim is to show the structural features of one language by means of another (Figure 4.1).

Function of translation	document of source-culture communicative interaction for target-culture readership			
Function of target text	metatextual function			
Type of translation	**DOCUMENTARY TRANSLATION**			
Form of translation	interlinear translation	literal translation	philological translation	exoticizing translation
Purpose of translation	reproduction of SL system	reproduction of ST form	reproduction of ST form and content	reproduction of ST form, content + situation
Focus of translation process	structures of SL lexis and syntax	lexical units of source text	syntactic units of source text	textual units of source text
Example	comparative linguistics	quotation in news text	Greek and Latin classics	modern literary prose

FIGURE 4.1   Documentary translations.

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Y TRANSLATION

philological translation	exoticizing translation
reproduction of ST form and content	reproduction of ST form, content + situation
syntactic units of source text	textual units of source text
Greek and Latin classics	modern literary prose

Example:

Estando	así	en	la	cama,	rogó		a	los	yernos
Being	so	in	the	bed	he/she asked	(to)	the	sons-in-law	

que	le	diesen		cierta	cantidad	de	dinero,
that	him	they-would-give	certain	amount	of	money,	

lo que	hicieron	de	buena	voluntad,	confiados	en la	herencia.
which	they-did	of	good	will,	confident	in the	inheritance.

Adapted from Fischer-Lexikon Sprachen *(1961:255)*

If a documentary translation is intended to reproduce the words of the original by adapting syntactic structures and idiomatic use of vocabulary to the norms of the target language, we may call it a *literal* or *grammar* translation. Apart from language classes, this kind of translation is often used for reported speech of foreign politicians in newspaper articles, in the translation of literal quotations in scholarly literature or, in combination with word-for-word methods, in intercultural studies referring to a language not familiar to the readers. The following example reproduces the excuse of a South African Sotho speaker who uses his left hand to pass something on to another person. In the interlinear gloss, functional items are represented by metalinguistic descriptions (1SG or 2SG= first-/second-person singular, NEG = negation particle).

Example:

Mw-	m-	má	wo	abenkúm
1SG	NEG	give	2SG	left hand

I do not give (it) to you with the left hand

Ameka 1994:445

If a documentary translation reproduces the source text rather literally but adds the necessary explanations about the source culture or some peculiarities of the source language in footnotes or glossaries, we may speak of *philological* or *learned* translation. This form is used frequently in the translation of ancient texts (such as Homer), in Bible translation, or in translations from distant cultures. In the following example taken from the English translation of a contemporary Indonesian novel, the names of historical personalities or realities of the source culture are explained in a glossary at the end of the book.

Example: "It's true...", my host said, surprising me with his long sigh. "I can understand why people think the way they do but in my opinion, which is one I share with the family here in Surakarta, Sultan Diponegoro was no hero."
[In the glossary:]

> *Diponegoro*. Javanese prince who led a five-year holy war against the Dutch between 1825 and 1830.

Y.B. Mangunwijaya, The Weaverbirds, *translated from the Indonesian by Thomas M. Hunter, Jakarta 1991*

If a documentary translation of a fictional text leaves the source-culture setting of the story unchanged, it might create the impression of exotic strangeness or cultural distance for the target audience. We may then speak of an *exoticizing* translation. The translation is documentary in that it changes the communicative function of the source text. What is appellative in the source text (for example, reminding the readers of their own world) becomes informative for target readers (showing what the world of the source culture is like).

Example: If Gabriel García Márquez describes a Colombian village, which he calls Macondo, Colombian readers will be able to compare the description with their own knowledge or experience, thus detecting the author's hidden (appellative) message. The text cannot have the same function for European readers, who will read the text as a kind of information about an exotic country. That is, there is no direct communicative contact between the author and the target audience. The target audience plays the part of an observer listening to the conversation of two strange parties. This is not the translator's fault (however much some people like to call them 'traitors'); it is an inevitable feature of any exoticizing literary translation.

Instrumental forms of translation

The result of an instrumental translation is a text that may achieve the same range of functions as an original text. If the target-text function is the same as that of the source text, we can speak of an *equifunctional* translation; if there is a difference between source- and target-text functions, we would have a *heterofunctional* translation; and if the (literary) status of the target text within the target-culture text corpus corresponds to the (literary) status the original has in the source-culture text corpus, we could talk about a *homologous* translation. We will now explain each of these three types.

Equifunctional translations are found in the area of technical texts, computer manuals, and other pragmatic texts such as instructions for use, recipes, tourist information texts, and information on products. These cases correspond to what Reiss calls 'communicative translation', in which receivers ideally do not notice, or are not even interested in, the fact that they are reading a translation. It should be noted, however, that there is no universal rule that all technical texts *must* be translated instrumentally. Equifunctional translations often make use of standardized formulas or clichés (Figure 4.2).

Example: Equifunctional translations of orders

> Zutritt verboten!
> No entry.
> Défense d'entrer.
> Prohibido entrar.

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he impression of exotic strange-
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Function of translation	instrument for target-culture communicative interaction modelled according to source-culture communicative interaction		
Function of target text	referential / expressive / appellative / phatic function(s) and/or sub functions		
Type of translation	**INSTRUMENTAL TRANSLATION**		
Form of translation	equifunctional translation	heterofunctional translation	homologous translation
Purpose of translation	achieve ST function(s) for target audience	achieve similar function(s) as ST for target audience	achieve homologous effect to source text
Focus of translation process	functional units of source text	transferable functions of source text	degree of ST originality
Example	operating instructions	*Gulliver's Travels* for children	poetry in monolingual edition

FIGURE 4.2 Instrumental translations.

A *heterofunctional translation* is used if the function or functions of the original cannot be preserved as a whole or in the same hierarchy for reasons of cultural and/or temporal distance. If, for example, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or Cervantes's *Don Quixote* is translated as a children's book, the satirical (appellative) function, which has become obsolete for most modern readers who do not know the original situation, is substituted in rank by the reference to an amusing fictional story in an exotic setting. Eugene A. Nida's 'dynamic equivalence' also changes the referential function in order to save the appellative function, as in the following example.

Example: The Austrian translator Eberhard Petschinka, who adapted John Godber's play *Bouncers* for a Vienna stage production (*The Bouncers: Die Nacht gehört uns*), changed all the references to "working-class Britons at play" (Godber) into references to working-class Viennese. He thus changed the referential function of the play in order to keep the appellative function the same.

In a *homologous translation* the *tertium comparationis* between the source and the target text is a certain status within a corpus or system, mostly with respect to literary or poetic texts. Here the target text might be supposed to represent the same, or a homologous, degree of originality as the original with regard to the respective culture-specific corpora of texts. This would mean, for example, that Greek hexameter is not translated by English hexameter but by blank verse or another metre as common as the hexameter verse was in ancient Greek epic poetry.

Homologous translations are 'semiotic transformations' for Alexander Ludskanov and 'creative transposition' in Roman Jakobson's terms (cf. Bassnett 1991:18). They might include such texts as the translation of Baudelaire's poetry by the German poet Stefan George. Although they are often excluded from the realm of 'translation proper', for functionalism they obey a specific *Skopos* and are thus just as justifiable as any other form of intercultural transfer. In this, they are like interlinear translations, which are located, as it were, at the other end of a broad scale of different relationships between source and target texts.

Example: Susan Bassnett (1991:84ff.) reproduces a homologous translation of Catullus's Poem 13 by Ben Johnson, of which I quote the first five lines:

> An invitation to dinner
> Cenabis bene, mi Fabulle, apud me
> paucis, si tibi di favent, diebus,
> si tecum attuleris bonam atque magnam
> cenam, non sine candida puella
> et vino et sale et omnibus cachinnis. [...]
>
> To night, grave sir, both my poore house, and I
> doe equally desire your companie:
> Not that we thinke us worthy such a ghest,
> But that your worth will dignifie our fest,
> With those that come; whose grace may make that seeme
> Something, which, else, could hope for no esteeme. [...]

In the reception of an instrumental translation, readers are not supposed to be aware they are reading a translation at all. The form of the text is thus usually adapted to target-culture norms and conventions of text type, genre, register, and tenor.

Norms and conventions in functional translation

At this point, we ought to take a closer look at the role conventions play in functionalist approaches to translation. A general study of translation norms and conventions would definitely go beyond the scope of this book (for a general approach, see, for example, Toury 1980 and Chesterman 1993, 1997). We will thus give no more than a brief explanation of some of the more important types of convention the translator may come across. For our purposes, conventions will be considered to be implicit or tacit non-binding regulations of behaviour, based on common knowledge and the expectation of what others expect you to expect them (etc.) to do in a certain situation (cf. Nord 1991:96).

When discussing the role of conventions in *Skopostheorie*, Reiss and Vermeer ([1984]2013:164ff) restrict themselves to genre conventions. In my opinion, there are a number of other types of convention that have to be taken into consideration in functional translation.