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SKOPOS THEORY AND FUNCTIONALISM IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

As we have seen, *Skopostheorie* and its functionalist applications were limited to the German-speaking area during the first 10 years after its publication. Their reception was accompanied by misunderstandings and misrepresentations. It almost comes as a surprise that after some years, thanks to a small group of followers, the theory became known in other countries and even triggered an impressive number of studies in many different areas of translation studies in the new millennium.

After the publication of the present book at the end of the 1990s, the functionalist theory had already made its way to several parts of the world. Apart from the publications by Vermeer, Holz-Mänttari, and Reiss, BITRA, the translation studies bibliography hosted by the University of Alicante, Spain, lists 39 secondary publications with the keyword *Skopos* between 1990 and 1999 (4 books; 15 articles; and 20 book chapters, three of which are in encyclopaedias or handbooks). Seventeen of these publications are in German, thirteen in English, eight in Spanish, and one is in Brazilian Portuguese. In addition to Germany, the authors or publishing houses are located in Austria, Mexico, Great Britain, the United States, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, Finland, South Africa, and South Korea. The authors deal with a great variety of topics, from general aspects of *Skopostheorie*, communicative functions, and translation pedagogy to more specific topics, like the translation of titles, citations, or other specific genres (e.g. advertisements, scientific texts for non-specialized audiences, theatre plays, or legal texts).

This trend continues in the first decade of the new millennium, which may be regarded as the 'boom' of functionalism. Between 2000 and 2009, BITRA registers 71 publications about *Skopostheorie* and its applications by authors who call themselves 'functionalists' or deal with their topics from a functional point of view. Germany is still the most productive country in terms of functionalist studies (29 percent), but the German language loses its predominant rank,

which is now held by English (46 percent), followed by Spanish (15 percent). Between 2010 and 2017, BITRA lists 52 titles with the keyword *Skopos*. Similarly, the *Translation Studies Bibliography* hosted by John Benjamins (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2017) includes 101 titles between 2000 and 2017.

General representations of the theory are much more balanced than they were in the first few years. Edwin Gentzler's contribution to the *International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Kittel et al. 2004), 'The cultural turn / Translation Studies in Europe', presents a correct account of *Skopostheorie* and functionalism. After a brief summary of Reiss and Vermeer (1984), the author recognizes the contributions by Nord, Holz-Mänttari, Snell-Hornby, and House as well as by Hönig and Kussmaul (Gentzler 2004:167–170). With regard to Snell-Hornby, the classification as functionalist seems debatable, although her integrated approach links well with functionalist views. House always subscribed, and still subscribes, to an equivalence-based, albeit differentiated, concept of translation. Snell-Hornby offers an excellent description of *Skopostheorie* in her book *The Turns of Translation* (Snell-Hornby 2006:51–60), and so does Jeremy Munday in *Introducing Translation Studies* (Munday 2008:79–88). Unlike earlier representations, these two draw directly on primary publications written in German.

The academic world

It was the Spanish translation of Reiss and Vermeer 1984 (Reiss and Vermeer [1984]1996) as well as a rather complete representation of the theory and some of its didactic applications by Amparo Hurtado Albir (Hurtado Albir 2001:526–537) that made a rather strong impact in the Spanish-speaking world. Most scholars in Spain and Latin America adopting a functional perspective without having access to the primary texts in German or English quote Hurtado Albir, who draws mainly on the first edition of the present book. It was not until 2013 that an English translation of Reiss and Vermeer 1984 made the theory directly available to scholars who did not read German or Spanish (Reiss and Vermeer [1984]2013).

China is one of the countries where *Skopostheorie* fell on particularly fertile ground. After an intensive email exchange with me about the central concepts of the theory (including loyalty; see Chapter 8), Jian-hua Bian wrote her doctoral thesis on the functional approach to translation (in Chinese, Bian 2006, cf. also Bian 2008, Bian and Cui 2006).

This period is particularly rich in translations, among them translations of the present book into Chinese in 2005, Korean in 2006, French in 2008, Greek in 2014, and Farsi in 2017. *Textanalyse und Übersetzen*, first published in German in 1988 (Nord [1988]2009) and in English as *Text Analysis in Translation* in 1991 (Nord [1991]2005), was translated into Arabic (2009), Spanish (Nord [1988]2012), Chinese (2013), and Brazilian Portuguese (Nord [1988]2016). A translation into Turkish is in preparation.

In this decade, functionalist research focusses on the application of *Skopostheorie* to the methodology of translator training and on the verification of

functionalist axioms. Some studies deal with particular translation problems, such as literary irony as a specific kind of expressive function (cf. Fehlauer-Lenz 2009) or ideology in sensitive texts (Degen 2008). Ulf Norberg (2003) presents a functionalist analysis of the translation process, and Guadalupe Ruiz Yepes (2005, 2006, 2009) combines functionalism with corpus-based translation studies. Christina Schäffner and Uwe Wiesemann (2001), Nord (2001), and Dirk Bretschneider and Stephan Walter (2008) apply functionalism in textbooks for English-German, Spanish-German, and German-Russian translation classes, respectively, using realistic translation briefs, practice-oriented text material, and a systematic approach to translation problems.

Audience-orientation has always been a particularly sensitive aspect of functionalism (see Criticism 5). It is certainly easy to speak about the importance of the audience's expectations but rather difficult to find empirical proof of what recipients expect of translated texts in general or of specific genres in non-linguistic fields in particular. One way of looking at the expectations and background knowledge of a particular audience would be to analyse non-translated parallel texts because expectations are usually formed by what you have read before. However, these texts only tell us what readers expect of non-translated texts, while the response to translated texts might be different.

A very thorough study by Marie-Louise Nobs (Nobs 2006, 2009) might serve as a model of tackling this kind of problem. Drawing on interviews and questionnaires, Nobs analysed readers' responses to translated tourist information texts. Susanne Göpferich used think-aloud protocols to check the adequacy of (non-translated) popularizing texts (cf. Göpferich 2007a), but this methodology could also be useful for translated texts, particularly in the field of science and technology. Data retrieved from empirical studies may have immediate consequences for the evaluation criteria in the translation classroom and teaching methodologies in general.

With regard to translator training and curriculum design, the Bologna Process produced some uncertainties at the beginning of the millennium. In this context, Elisa Calvo Encinas, now working at the University Pablo de Olavide of Seville, Spain, presented a well-documented study on the state of the Faculties for Translation and Interpreting in Spain, which was based on a functionalist perspective (Calvo Encinas 2009). To appreciate what is happening in training institutions, it is also essential to look at the training competences of translation teachers. Dorothy Kelly, also from the University of Granada, published an excellent handbook on this topic (Kelly 2005). A promising endeavour is the master's programme in Translation Pedagogy run by the Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín, Colombia, a joint venture between the Department of Foreign Languages and the Department of Education.

The translator's workplace

When I was a student of translation, it was beyond the scope of a (German) university department to bother about the profession for which they were training

the students. It was one of the merits of *Skopostheorie* to have brought the real conditions of professional translation and interpreting to the attention of researchers. Since the conditions for translation and interpreting as well as the labour market of intercultural mediation are becoming more and more global, the translator's workplace will be a promising field of study for some years to come.

In her article about translation competence, Matilde Nisbeth Brøgger from the University of Aarhus, Denmark, presents an empirical study focussing on the output of medical translators. She states,

One of the main notions in functionalist approaches to translation is that the translator is a responsible agent and an expert in translational action (Vermeer 2004). [...] According to Nord (2006:30), if the client is unwilling to provide the necessary information, the client has to "take what they get", which is often a target text that may fit many different functions, but not necessarily one that fits all the receiver's needs. Such an approach also seems to be taken in PIL [Patients Information Leaflets] translation, when the professional translators feel their message falls on deaf ears. Such an approach is understandable in light of the temporal and financial constraints; however, it might lead to problematic PIL translations.

Nisbeth Brøgger 2017:411

Functionalism in legal translation

It is widely recognized that functional approaches are useful and applicable to the translation of advertisements or operating instructions, but this is not equally true for legal translation, although the distinction between documentary and instrumental translation has been applied by a number of scholars (e.g. Prieto Ramos 2002, Mayoral 2002, Calvo Encinas 2002, Dullion 2007).

Fernando Prieto Ramos was a pioneer in applying the functional approach to legal translation. Inspired by Nord's looping model of the translation process (Nord [1991]2005:39), he illustrated how terminological choices in the translation of court summonses and in legal translation in general are guided by the translator's search for communicative adequacy (Prieto Ramos 1998, 2002). This model was later elaborated and tested by the author in different professional fields until he finally developed an interdisciplinary and truly integrated model that can be applied to any type of legal text or context.

This model combines the analysis of the translation brief and the communicative situation (including the distinction between documentary and instrumental translation) with the legal contextualization of the translational action (legal system, branch of law, text genre) as a first step in the definition of the overall 'adequacy strategy'. In the transfer phase, the acceptability of the possible reformulations is checked with regard to that strategy and the microtextual priorities, considering legal functions and receivers' needs and expectations (cf., for example, Prieto Ramos 2013:97). This approach served as a basis for various applications in terminology and quality assessment, e.g. definition of the requirements

for the development of translation-oriented lexicographical resources and assessment of terminological databases (Prieto Ramos 2014a); the elaboration of translation-oriented terminological records (Prieto Ramos and Orozco Jutorán 2015); or the analysis of adequacy levels of terminological choices in institutional text corpora (Prieto Ramos and Guzmán 2017).

In other instances, 'functionalist' views of legal translation have been misleadingly associated with static ideas of function and equivalence rather than a dynamic notion of adequacy. This is the case of Elena Ferran Larraz (2010), for example, who states that

the very notion the law has of legal translation is functionalist, since a translation serves the *function of legal efficiency* of the document produced in the context of international cooperation. We think, therefore, that legal translation can benefit from functionalist translation studies, which consider it to be an act of pragmatic communication.

My translation and emphasis

On the other hand, she supports the idea of 'sufficient functional equivalence' with the following argument:

In legal translation, the communicative situations of both texts are essentially the same: both the source and the target text are interpreted in terms of legal effects that are regarded as *sufficiently equivalent universals*.

If we apply Nord's functionalism (1991; 1997) to the brief for legal translation used in this international communicative situation, *normally between two experts*, the translation purpose or skopos defined in the translation brief is inevitably, as we see it, to make sure that the source text achieves its characteristic legal effects. It is a standard brief determined by the ultimate purpose to *produce legal effects*.

My translation and emphasis

In her argument, the author overlooks the fact that the translation purpose of a particular genre produced in *common law*, as analysed in her article, does not allow for generalizations. Not all translations of legal texts are intended to have legal force in the target culture. As Giuliana Garzone rightly puts it,

the crucial point is whether the concept of legal equivalence is applicable to all text types, genres and sub-genres in legal translation. A brief review of some of the most common typologies of legal translations and the translational procedures routinely implemented in actual practice, based on pragmatic criteria, e.g. considering the legal force of the original and of the translated text respectively, will show that the concept of legal equivalence is not unconditionally suited to all situations and text types and confirms that in many cases the translator adopts a different approach: quite

significantly, this criterion was originally formulated in a bilingual (and often bi-juridical) context, and finds its rationale in the necessity that the translated text should have autonomous force, i.e. independent legal validity. Other categories of legal texts may have different pragmatic characteristics (i.e. different felicity or validity conditions) thus requiring different translating procedures.

Garzone 2000:5

Along these lines, Prieto Ramos (2014b) suggests a multidimensional typology of legal texts whose universalism tries to overcome the limitations of earlier approaches. He distinguishes five text categories: legislative texts (including treaties), judicial texts (including court and litigation documents), other public legal instruments or texts of legal implementation, private legal instruments, and legal scholarly writings. These are intended to serve three main functions: to govern public or private legal relations, to apply legal instruments in specific scenarios, and to convey specialized knowledge on sources of law and legal relations.

The complex reality [reflected in this categorization] delineates a vast scope which demands enormous versatility of legal translators and must be acknowledged in LTS [Legal Translation Studies] as a condition for building universally-valid conceptual models. LTS scholars have often focused on particular legal relations and text types (predominantly legislative) as a basis for generalizations on legal translation.

Prieto Ramos 2014b:265

Functionalism in literary and religious texts

Other “specific cases” in which the applicability of functionalism is put in doubt are the translation of literary and religious texts. During the past few years, a number of studies have shown that a functional approach can also be useful in these cases: Nord (2005) and Jonathan Downie (2009a, 2009b) on functionalism in Bible translation, José Raimundo Guimarães (2009) on the translation of the Bhagavad Gita, Zhi-lian Zhou (2007), and Girassol Sant’ana and Rafael Cordeiro (2009) on literary translation, to name a few examples.

Regarding literary translation, I would like to mention an interesting experiment presented by the Brazilian scholar and literary translator Mauricio Mendonça Cardozo, now professor at the Universidade Federal do Paraná in Curitiba, Brazil. As a kind of by-product of his doctoral thesis, in which he elaborated a model for translation criticism, he produced two parallel versions of Theodor Storm’s novella *Der Schimmelreiter* (Storm 2006). The first is a conventional exoticizing documentary translation with the title *A assombrosa história do homem do cavalo branco* (The amazing story of the man with the white horse), and the second is an instrumental translation with the title *O centauro bronco* (The

wild centaur), which transfers the story from its North German environment to the Brazilian sertão. Both versions are called translations, and the idea is to put functionalism to the test.

Adaptation and transfer studies

Another field to which *Skopos* theory can be linked is that of adaptation studies. Adaptation studies, which became popular in literary theory in the 1950s and focussed on novel-to-film adaptation in an early stage, opened up to other media and other text types first and to transcultural adaptation later. In the new millennium, adaptation scholars have started to look across the fence towards translation studies (cf. Krebs 2013). In an article published in 2012 by Hugo Vandal-Sirois and Georges L. Bastin titled 'Adaptation and Appropriation. Is There a Limit?', we read,

Although many theories that push the domesticating 'agenda' suit the notion of adaptation very well, the functionalist approach seems the most suitable to describe the reasons why a translator resorts to adapting a text. Since adaptations are motivated by keeping the source text applicable to the target culture, and ensuring the efficacy of a text for a specific group of readers, the translator should consider the purpose of the text that will be introduced in a different culture, the reason why the translation is requested, and the target readers of the translation.

Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 2012:25

[...] ... the purposeful nature of adaptations illustrates how well this translational practice comes within the scope of functionalist theories. Giuseppe Palumbo's definition of the functionalist approach, where translation is seen 'as an act of communication and a form of action involving not only linguistic but also social and cultural factors' (Palumbo 2009:50), illustrates how convenient and valuable the technique of adaptation is for functionalist translators. Many elements related to the functionalist theory of translation are relevant to adaptations, from Hans Vermeer's *skopos* (Vermeer 1996) to Christiane Nord's loyalty (Nord 1997).

Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 2012:25

Along similar lines, transfer studies, a recent "transdiscipline" also of German origin (cf. Antos 2001, Göpferich 2007b), investigates access to knowledge in the broadest sense (cf. Göpferich 2010). Here too, certain aspects of *Skopos* theory, like audience orientation or the intended function of the transfer, have fallen on fertile ground.

Of course, as we have tried to make clear (see Chapter 3), in this sense, both "adaptation" and "transfer" are only half the truth about functionalism in translation. It has to be emphasized, again and again, that the opposite strategy may

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lead to a "functional" translation as well (if required by the brief), which is often overlooked. An interlinear translation is functional if the brief demands an exact reproduction of the source-language structures present in the source text, and an exoticizing translation, which adapts language and style but not the contents of a story set in an "exotic" environment, is equally functional as the adaptation of language, style, and content in an advertising campaign designed for another culture.

As we have seen in this brief overview, *Skopos*theorie and its functionalist applications, limited in the beginning to the German-speaking area and hampered in their development by misunderstandings and misrepresentations in the first decade, finally spread across (almost) the whole world and inspired scholars in many different subfields of translation studies and even in other disciplines. If this book continues to help them gain a better understanding of the theory and its applications in its original field of translation and interpreting, it will have achieved its *skopos*.