

TRANSLATING AS A PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY: A PROSPECTIVE APPROACH*

*Christiane Nord***

ABSTRACT: Taking a prospective approach to translation, translators choose their translation strategies according to the purpose or function the translated text is intended to fulfil for the target audience. Since communicative purposes need certain conditions in order to work, it is the translator's task to analyse the conditions of the target culture and to decide whether, and how, the source-text purposes can work for the target audience according to the specifications of the translation brief. If the target-culture conditions differ from those of the source culture, there are usually two basic options: either to transform the text in such a way that it can work under target-culture conditions (instrumental translation), or to replace the source-text functions by their respective meta-functions (documentary translation).

KEYWORDS: offer of information, communicative functions, translation strategy, documentary translation, instrumental translation, translation brief.

RESUMO: Adotando uma atitude prospectiva em relação à tradução, os tradutores escolhem suas estratégias de tradução de acordo com o objetivo ou a função que o texto traduzido deve desempenhar junto ao público destinatário. Porém, é preciso que certas condições sejam satisfeitas para

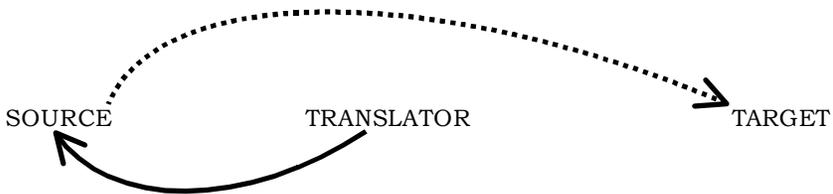
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** Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal, Germany. The author is also a research fellow of the University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

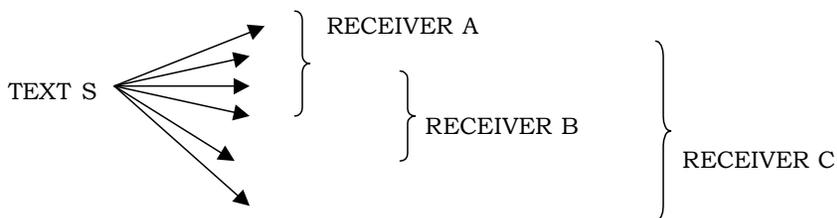
que os objetivos comunicativos sejam atingidos. É parte da tarefa do tradutor analisar as condições da cultura de chegada e decidir se e como os objetivos do texto de partida podem funcionar para o público-alvo de acordo com as especificações da tarefa de tradução. Se as condições da cultura de chegada diferem daquelas da cultura de partida, existem normalmente duas opções básicas: ou transformar o texto de modo a fazê-lo funcionar sob as condições da cultura de chegada (tradução instrumental), ou substituir as funções do texto de partida por suas respectivas meta-funções (tradução documentária).

UNITERMOS: oferta de informação; funções comunicativas; estratégia de tradução; tradução documentária; tradução instrumental; instruções para a tradução.

Traditional approaches to translation usually view translations as being a re-production of an existing source text, where “the source text” is the main yardstick governing the translator’s decisions. If we look at the translation process as leading from a point S (the source) to another point T (the target), this means that such approaches take a retrospective view of translation.

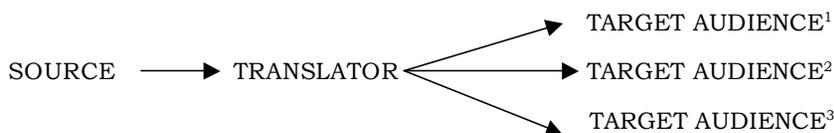


Modern approaches, however, start out from a dynamic model of what a “text” is: they say that a text is an “offer of information”, from which the receiver accepts what he wants or needs (cf. Reiss/Vermeer, 1984). We all have had the experience of different readers, depending on their previous knowledge and attitudes, getting quite different “messages” out of the very same text, so that sometimes we wonder whether they have really been reading the same text.



If this is so, it would be very difficult for any translator to translate “the” source text because one text may be as many texts as there are receivers of it. The translator is only one of them, and usually (when translating into their own language and culture) translators do not even belong to the audience addressed by the source text. Merely by looking back at the source text they will not be able to find out what another receiver might find interesting or important in this text – particularly in cases where this other receiver is located in and influenced by another culture community and its specific perspective on the things and phenomena of the world.

Therefore, it may be wise to take a prospective view of translation as being an activity geared toward a communicative aim or purpose. Every translation is intended to achieve a particular communicative purpose in the target audience, and if we analyse who the target audience will be and what they may need and expect, we might be in a better position in order to deliver a product that suits their needs and expectations. The following diagram illustrates the prospective approach: After receiving (and analysing) the source text, the translator transforms it so as to suit it to a particular target audience from among various possible audiences.



Translating as a form of interaction

I read somewhere that in a certain Swedish youth hostel you will find the following request:

Germans: Please, don't get up before 6 a.m.!

Americans: Please, don't come home after 2 a.m.!

Italians: Please, don't sing after 10 p.m.!

Swedes: Please, don't take girls up to the rooms!

Obviously the manager's intention is to request that visitors don't disturb others during the night. It is evident that the request not to get up before 6 would mean nothing to people who sleep until 10 o'clock in the morning anyway (because they have come in late or because they have been singing until midnight) and vice versa. Therefore, it seems reasonable to address each nationality asking them to refrain from the habit that may be annoying to the other guests.

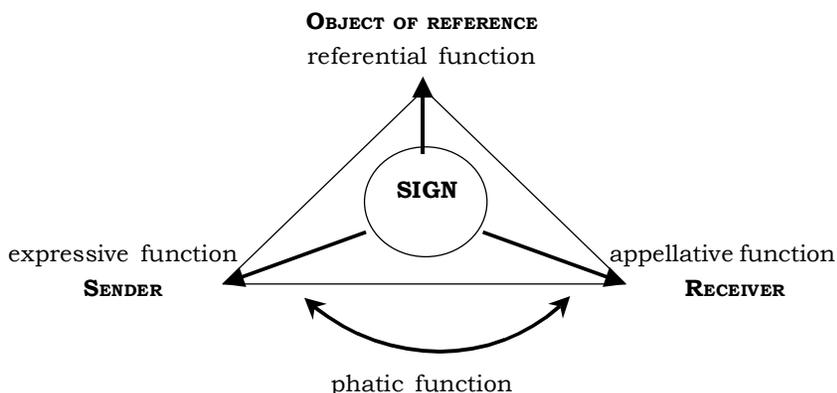
In other words: Human actions or activities are carried out by 'agents', individuals playing roles. When playing the role of senders in communication, people have communicative purposes that they try to put into practice by means of texts. Communicative purposes are aimed at other people who are playing the role of receivers. Communication takes place through a medium and in situations that are limited in time and place. Each specific situation determines what and how people communicate, and it is changed by people communicating. Situations are not universal but are embedded in a cultural habitat, which in turn conditions the situation. Language is thus to be regarded as part of culture. And each communication act is conditioned by the constraints of the situation-in-culture (cf. Nord, 1997).

In translation, senders and receivers belong to different cultural groups in that they speak different languages. Non-verbal forms of behaviour may be different as well. Thus, senders and receivers need help from someone who is familiar with both languages and cultures and who is willing to play the role of translator or intermediary between them. In professional settings, translators don't normally act on their own account; they are asked to intervene either by the sender or the receiver, or perhaps by a third person. From an observer's point of view, this third party will be playing the role of 'commissioner' or 'initiator'; from the translator's point of view, they will be the 'client' or 'customer'. Initiators may have communicative purposes of their

own or they may share either the sender's or the receiver's purposes. Therefore, translating involves aiming at a particular communicative purpose that may or may not be identical with the one that other participants have in mind.

A classification of communicative purposes

Various models of text function could serve as points of departure for the classification of communicative purposes. The model I propose (cf. Nord, 1997: 40ff.) is meant to be no more than an example. Its main advantages are that it has a clear focus on translation and it is simple enough to be applicable both in translator training and in professional settings. My model draws on Karl Bühler's organon model (1934). Bühler proposed that there were three basic functions of language: referential, expressive and appellative. I have added a fourth function, which seems to be lacking in Bühler's model but is included in Roman Jakobson's model of language functions (1960): the phatic function. These four basic functions can be broken down into various sub-functions focusing on the way they are represented in texts and how they may concern specific translation problems.



The phatic function

The phatic function aims at opening and closing the channel between sender and receiver, and to make sure it remains open as long as sender and receiver want to communicate. It relies on the conventionality of the linguistic, non-linguistic and paralinguistic means used in a particular situation, such as small talk about the weather or the conventional proverb used as an opening device in (German) tourist information texts.

Example: Bremen

HERZLICH WILLKOMMEN IN BREMEN!	WELCOME TO BREMEN	BIENVENUE À BRÈME!
Wie man sich bettet, so schläft man, sagt ein Sprichwort. Dabei wollen wir Ihnen, lieber Gast, mit dieser Hotelliste behilflich sein. [...]	There is proverb [sic] which says "As you make your bed so you must lie on it". That is why we hope that this Hotel List will be of service to you for your stay in Bremen. [...]	"Comme on fait son lit, on se couche [sic]" dit le proverbe. C'est pourquoi nous voulons vous apporter notre aide, cher touriste, avec cette liste d'hôtels. [...]

The purpose of the proverb is simply to establish a good-humoured and friendly atmosphere. The French translation can be considered to fulfil the same function (in spite of the typo in "couche") because the French proverb is used in similar situations as the German one. The English translation, however, does not really serve the intended purpose because it tells the reader that it was not a very good idea to come to Bremen in the first place. If there is no proverb in the target text, the phatic function might have been achieved by some phrase alluding to a long sight-seeing walk through the city after which the tourist may want to have a good night's rest.

In audience-oriented texts (especially in face-to-face communication), one of the most important aspects of the phatic function is the way the reader is addressed. This becomes obvious when dealing with Asian cultures where the number and variety of forms of address and honorifics poses severe communication problems to west Europeans. But even comparing English with other languages which have more than one form of address (like German, French, Spanish, or Portuguese), we find that English speakers use other markers of formal or informal

discourse (e.g. register) where others indicate the role relationship between communicants by their choice of pronouns and/or verb forms (cf. Nord, 2002).

The referential function

The referential function of an utterance involves reference to the objects and phenomena of the world or of a particular world, perhaps a fictional one. It may be analysed according to the nature of the object or referent concerned. If the referent is a fact or state of things unknown to the receiver (for example, a political incident that happened the day before, or a new product) the text function may consist in reporting or describing; if the referent is a language or a specific use of language, the text function may be metalinguistic; if the referent is the correct way of handling a washing machine or of bottling fruit, the text function may be instructive. Of course, this list of sub-functions cannot be exhaustive.

Clearly the referential function depends on the comprehensibility of the text, which, in turn, relies on whether the amount of presupposed knowledge is appropriate for the addressed audience. The referential function poses problems when source and target receivers do not share the same amount of previous knowledge about the objects and phenomena referred to, as is often the case with source-culture realities or *realia*.

Example: The waters of Maine

An American journalist referring to his feelings in his first Chinese lesson describes one of the four tones of Mandarin by means of a comparison: “The third tone rises. I think of calling to shore while wading into the waters of Maine.” The comparison is incomprehensible for a person who does not know that the waters of Maine are ice-cold.

The expressive function

In my model, the expressive function refers to the sender’s attitude toward the objects and phenomena of the world. It may

be subdivided according to what is expressed. If the sender expresses individual feelings or emotions (e.g. in an interjection) we may speak of an emotive sub-function. If what is expressed is an evaluation (perhaps of the food the speaker is eating), the sub-function will be evaluative. Another sub-function might be irony. Of course, a particular text can be designed to achieve a combination of several functions and sub-functions.

Example: Une mort très douce

In Simone de Beauvoir's title *Une mort très douce*, the adjective *douce* ('sweet') expresses an emotion. The English translation, *A Very Easy Death*, expresses a kind of evaluation, perhaps as seen from a doctor's point of view. The German translation *Ein sanfter Tod* combines the two aspects because 'sanft' might mean 'sweet' from the dying person's viewpoint and 'easy' or 'painless' from a more detached perspective.

The expressive function is sender-oriented. The sender's opinions or attitudes with regard to the referent are based on the value system assumed to be common to both sender and receiver. An explicit expressivity, as in the example, can be conveyed even to a person who does not share the same value system. But there are implicit evaluations, like in '*The Gardol food moth trap is completely natural.*', which can only be interpreted correctly in the light of a value system which regards natural products as something positive.

Example:

In India if a man compares the eyes of his wife to those of a cow, he expresses admiration for their beauty. In Germany, a woman would not be very pleased if her husband did the same.

The appellative function

Directed at the receiver's sensitivity or disposition to act, the appellative function is designed to induce the receiver to re-

spond in a particular way. If we want to illustrate a hypothesis with an example, we appeal to the reader's previous experience or knowledge; the intended reaction would be recognition of something known. If we want to persuade someone to do something or to share a particular viewpoint, we appeal to his secret desires or his reason. If we want to make someone buy a particular product, we appeal to his real or imagined needs, describing those qualities of the product that are presumed to have positive values in the receivers' value system. If we want to educate a person, we may appeal to their susceptibility to ethical and moral principles.

Direct indicators of the appellative function would be features like imperatives, questions or modal verbs like *must* or *should*. Yet the function may also be achieved indirectly through linguistic or stylistic devices that point to a referential or expressive function, such as superlatives, adjectives or nouns expressing positive values (like "completely natural"). The appellative function may even operate in poetic language, appealing to the reader's aesthetic sensitivity.

Example:

If you're an American living abroad and you need to keep track of your calls, you really ought to get the *AT&T Card*.

Example:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date: [...]

(William Shakespeare)

Purposes across cultures

This classification of purposes is not a text typology like the one suggested by Reiss (1971 and later). Texts are not normally intended for one function only. On the contrary, we observe that most texts present indicators of all four or at least three of the described basic functions and their respective sub-functions, although we may assume that one of them very often

is supposed to be dominant. An example are advertising texts where the appellative-persuasive function is dominant in spite of an apparently referential description of the product.

Let us now look at what happens to the functions intended by the source-text sender when the audience belongs to a different culture, i.e. in translation.

The phatic function across cultures

As we have seen, the phatic function relies on the conventionality of forms (e.g. forms of address). If we want the phatic function to work in another culture, the members of this culture must be able to recognize the forms as conventional and typical of the phatic function. In those cases where source and target culture share the same phatic conventions (e.g. a small talk about the weather to break the ice between persons who haven't met before), a reproduction of source-text forms in the other language should work fine. But if this is not the case, the translator will have two options:

- either to adapt the forms to target-culture conventions, thus making the phatic function work for the target audience (option A),
- or to explain to the target receivers that the forms used are meant to be phatic in the source culture. In this case, the phatic function of the source text would be changed into a meta-phatic function, which is in fact referential: telling the target audience about how the phatic function works in the source culture (option B).

The referential function across cultures

The referential function works on the basis of the information explicitly verbalized in the text plus the information which is not explicitly verbalized because it is assumed to be known to the addressed (source-culture) audience. In intercultural communication, the referential function of the source-text will also

work for target-culture members if (a) the textual information is sufficiently explicit or if the target audience is sufficiently familiar with the object the source text refers to. If this condition is not met, the translator, again, has two basic options:

- either to explicitate the amount of pre-supposed information that is only implicitly given in the source-text, thus making the referential function work for the target audience (option A),
- or to explain the referential function of the source text to the target-culture receivers by giving additional information in a meta-text (e.g. glossary, footnote, foreword), which, in fact, would change the referential function into a meta-referential function (option B).

The expressive function across cultures

The expressive function can be either explicit or implicit. If it is explicit, it works on the basis of evaluative or emotive linguistic elements, and these can be transferred into the target language. However, if the expressive function is implicit, it works on the ground of the value system and perspective shared by sender and receiver. In intercultural communication, this does not pose any problems if source and target cultures share the same value system. If value systems differ, the translator again has to choose between two basic strategies:

- either to explicitate the implicit expressivity so that it can be interpreted correctly by the target audience (option A),
- or to explain the expressivity of the source text to the target readership in a meta-expressive commentary, e.g. in a footnote (option B).

The appellative function across cultures

For the appellative function, the sender needs the cooperation of the receiver. If the receiver does not want or is not able

to respond to the appeal, the appellative function will not work. If the conditions for an appropriate response (i.e. sensitivity, background knowledge, experience, value systems, etc.) are not identical or at least similar in the source and the target situation, the translator will have to decide again:

- either to make the appeal work for the target audience by adapting it to target-culture conditions (option A),
- or to change the appellative into a meta-appellative function by means of explanations or comments (option B).

The meta-appellative function may amount to something like explaining why a joke is funny (which kills the appellative function of the joke), but in certain situations, this is what the client wants the translator to do (e.g. if they want to learn about the other culture's sense of humour).

Conclusions

We see that “equivalence of functions” in source and target cultures is not precisely the easiest task a translator can come across. But in a large number of professional translation tasks, equivalence is not required or not even desired. Just think of the translation of a school report you need in order to apply for a scholarship at a German university. A Brazilian school report will not become a German “Abiturzeugnis” by being translated into the German language. It will still be a Brazilian school report which informs the German university administration about the (Brazilian) evaluation of your achievements at a (Brazilian) pre-university educational institution. There will be an annex in which the translator explains the Brazilian marking system. This translation does not pretend to be an equivalent of the original, and it could not be used to enter any higher education in Brazil.

The two options between which the translator has to choose in those cases where a mere linguistic transfer of the source text does not lead to functional equivalence in the target culture remind us of the dichotomies set up by several translation theorists across the centuries. Just think of

- Cicero, who distinguished between translating ‘like a rhetorician’ (*‘ut orator’*, option A) or ‘like a translator’ (*‘ut interpretes’*, option B) (cf. Cicero, 46 B.C.),
- Martin Luther, who made a distinction between ‘germanizing’ (option A) and “translating” (option B) (cf. Luther, 1530),
- Schleiermacher, who spoke about ‘taking the text to the reader’ (option A) or ‘taking the reader to the text’ (option B) (cf. Schleiermacher, 1838),
- Eugene A. Nida’s ‘functional’ or ‘dynamic equivalence’ (option A) vs. ‘formal’ equivalence” (option B) (cf. Nida, 1964), or
- Lawrence Venuti’s ‘domesticating’ (option A) vs. ‘foreignizing’ (option B) translation (Venuti, 1995),

to mention just a few well-known names.

In my terminology, I distinguish between ‘documentary’ and ‘instrumental’ translation (cf. Nord, 1989 and later). Unlike the other authors mentioned above, I do not propose that one of the two types is generally ‘better’ or ‘more appropriate’ than the other. It all depends on the translation brief or, to be more exact, on the conclusions the translator draws from the brief or the information they receive from the client about what kind of audience the translated text is addressed to and which purpose or purposes it is supposed to fulfil. Is it meant to give the receiver information about the way a particular source text works or worked for its source-culture audience, or is it intended to serve as a communicative ‘instrument’ in its own right, fulfilling the same or a similar function for a particular target-culture readership or a general target-language audience?

After interpreting the brief, the translator decides in favour of one strategy or the other. Therefore, it is no longer the source-text that guides the translator’s decisions but the overall communicative purpose the target text is supposed to achieve in the target culture. Translation, therefore, is a purposeful professional activity.

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