

What could (or maybe should) MT researchers know about translation (theory)?

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Outline

- Translation Studies (TS) and MT: commonalities, potentials, and differences from the perspective of TS (1)
- Functional translation theory: a concept that works in TS, and MT could benefit from it: text, text type, translation direction, and text status (2)
- Potential sources of translation difficulties: what should (not only) MT researchers be aware of (3)
- Translation criticism: the potentials and limitations (4)

Further Reading

- Baker, Mona (2018): In other words. London/New York: Routledge.
- Čulo, Oliver (2014): Approaching Machine Translation from Translation Studies – a perspective on commonalities, potentials, differences. EMT.
- Levý, Jiří (2011): The art of translation. John Benjamins.
- Nord, Christiane (2018): Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained. London/New York: Routledge.
- Reiss, Katharina (2014): Translation Criticism: The Potentials and Limitations. London/New York: Routledge.

Translation Studies (TS) and MT

- technological turn in TS
- technologies, CAT, basics in MT, post-editing – translation market has changed, translators and translation theoreticians are being educated (?)
- translation theory in MT?
- current research in such areas as TS, lexical studies, text linguistics and pragmatics
- the importance of cultural factors
- translation (theory) – discipline called TS – how meaning is generated within and between various groups of people **in various cultural settings** (Baker 2018)

Functional translation theory

- translation theory – translation theories!
- linguistic theory, “literal vs free” translation
- binary distinction of two types of translation strategy

- **documentary vs instrumental** translation (Nord, 2018)
- “how things are” (documenting, highlighting features of the source text, documentary translation by Nord) and “how things ought to be” (instrumental translation by Nord, appearing and behaving like a target culture text)

Functional translation theory: documentary vs instrumental strategy

Source text from 2017, translation in 2022

- Source text DE

2018 wird sie ihr Studium beendet haben.

- Documentary strategy DE-EN

In 2018, she will have finished her studies.

- Instrumental strategy DE-EN

In 2018, she finished her studies.

Functional translation theory: documentary vs instrumental strategy

Source text DE

Hier / Bei uns...

- Documentary strategy DE-EN

Here / With us...

- Instrumental strategy DE-EN

There / In Germany...

Source text DE

die amtierende Bundeskanzlerin

- Documentary strategy DE-EN

the current Chancellor

- Instrumental strategy DE-EN

the former Chancellor

Functional translation theory: documentary vs instrumental strategy

- When is the documentary strategy appropriate?
- exhibition of photographs 2022, photograph from 2019
- Das »Denkmal der nationalen Einheit« (Nemzeti összetartozás emlékhelye), besser bekannt unter dem Namen »Trianon-Denkmal«, befindet sich gerade im Bau und wird zum 100-jährigen Jubiläum des Trianon-Vertrages im Juni 2020 in Budapest eröffnet.
- The Monument of National Solidarity (Nemzeti összetartozás emlékhelye), better known as the Trianon Memorial, is currently under construction; the opening in Budapest is scheduled for June 2020 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon.

Binary terminology of translation strategies (adapted from Munday 2016, 311)

Theorist	Orientation Strategy	
Friedrich Schleiermacher	Naturalizing translation	Alienating translation
Eugene Nida	Dynamic equivalence (later called 'functional equivalence')	Formal equivalence (later called 'formal correspondence')
Peter Newmark	Communicative translation	Semantic translation
Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet	Oblique translation	Direct translation
Christiane Nord	Instrumental translation	Documentary translation
Juliane House	Covert translation	Overt translation
Gideon Toury	Acceptability	Adequacy
Theo Hermans	Target-oriented	Source-oriented
Lawrence Venuti	Domestication	Foreignization

Functional translation theory

- other attempts to formulate a general theory of translation
- Jiří Levý, Katharina Reiss, Hans Vermeer, and Christiane Nord
- empirical research methods to investigate the translation process

- For functional translation theory, **text, text type, translation direction, and text status** are important.

Text

- **TEXT = the main translation unit (not a word, not a sentence, not a segment!)**
- **cultural** and **situational** context + **purpose** of the translation are decisive factors in the process
- A text can **retain or change its function**, either by someone's **intention** (pamphlet - translating it as political program) or because it is **differently received** in the **target culture** than in the **source culture** (Baker, 2018)
- In terms of functional translation theory, one could characterise **MT** as a **kind of translation which generally aims at being instrumental** and **functionally constant** (i.e. retaining text function) (Čulo, 2014)

Text

- What makes a text a text?
- MT – domain, “document-level” x text in text linguistics?
- **textual strategies (textuality)**
- the contents (**informativity**)
- design elements (**cohesion and coherence**)
- the text producer's attitude and intention (**intentionality**)
- the situation in which a text is exchanged (**situationality**)
- target audience (**acceptability**)
- relationship with other texts (**intertextuality**) (Beaugrande – Dressler, 1981)

Intentionality, acceptability, situationality

- pragmatics
- Skopos theory
- „The highest rule of a theory of translational action is the “*skopos* rule”: any action is determined by its purpose, i.e. it is a function of its purpose or *skopos*.” (Reiß and Vermeer, 1984/2013: 90)

How should *xyz* be translated?

- „When I was trained as a translator, the question “How should *xyz* be translated?” was usually answered by “It depends...,” and then one teacher might add “... on the text type,” another one, “on the availability of a (potentially) equivalent structure or word or expression or sentence in the target language,” and yet another one “... on the context.” Students learned to conform to these *uncertain* guidelines as best they could in order to get a good mark and pass the exam. After graduating, they had to deal with commissioners or translation agencies who did not even specify on what it depended but demanded “just a translation” – which added to their *uncertainty*.” (Nord, 2016)

Text type

- rhetorical function
- the text type and genre determine to a great extent the form and method of the translation
- Text structure and textual strategies can differ between languages – in original texts we use other norms and conventions!

Text type

- **Business domain:** Shareholder letter – formal in German, colloquial in English (***We can make it!***) (example Čulo, 2014), differences in grammar: grammatical shifts (connected with translation direction, subject vs. object), passive and active voice in Czech and English / German
- **Popular Scientific Texts:** the extent of occurrence of original Latin terminology with no explanation varies, lexical items from English in German texts with no explanations are being explained in Czech texts etc.
- *In Kombination mit bestimmten **Tracertechnologien** können wir heute sogar Stoffwechselaktivitäten räumlich zuordnen.*
- *V kombinaci s určitými **sledovacími technologiemi** (angl. **tracer technology**) jsme dnes dokonce schopni mapovat specifické biochemické reakce na molekulární úrovni.*

Text type

- **News:** Example Czech – German: **Titles and headlines** (presence simple in German, past simple in Czech)
- *Experten entdecken Planeten, der von einem riesigen Ozean bedeckt ist*
- *Vědci objevili planetu, kterou pokrývá obrovský oceán*
- Specific tense in German news, first and last sentence in Perfekt etc. (depending on the position in text)
- An adaptation of MT systems not only to the lexis (terminology), but also to the concept of text type?

Translation direction

- From which into which language do I translate? Am I a native speaker of the source or of the target language? Or neither of them?
- In what aspect do the translations done by (non-)native speakers differ? “L2 translation (also referred to as non-native translation or inverse translation) remains a relatively under-explored area. Existing research suggests that L2 translation, and directionality in general, is a complex issue, with key factors including the text type, the client’s expectations and, perhaps most importantly, the translator’s individual skills.” (<https://l2translation.ff.cuni.cz>, 2022-09-07)
- MT: data from originals, translations, non-native translations

Text status

- original vs translated texts
- translated texts exhibit different features than texts originally written in the given language
- MT: translated texts in machine translation test sets?
- studies of linguistic features of translated texts called translationese
- Example: Originals and translations in one language differ in the distribution of these features (passive voice in German translated texts from English over-exhibits in comparison to German originals) (Čulo, 2014)

Text status: translationese in TS

- distinction between two categories
- translation universals that represent a general set of features shared by all translations, independent of the characteristics of involved languages (Baker et al., 1993)
- interference that reflects the impact of the source language, the “trace” which source language leaves in the translation (Toury, 1979)
- translationese in line with TS authorities (Newmark 1991, Baker et al., 1993): a lack of sensitivity to target language usage
- Levý: a poor, colourless, grey style

Text status: translationese in TS

- Popovič (1983): prekladateľčina (translationese) is a result of an inadequate translation method, the translator is mechanically dependent on the language of the original, whose linguistic and stylistic features he or she only passively reproduces.
- a big problem in translation agencies

Text status: translationese in TS

- the term "translationese" in MT
- the set of features that define translations as a distinct textual type
- As Karakanta (2019) points out, the term "translationese" cannot be automatically associated with unsatisfactory translation quality. Indeed, in addition to interference as an "imprint" of the source language, "translationese" also includes traces of the translation process itself, which include, among others, simplification, explicitness, and normalization of language.
- In TS: universal features of translation or translation universals (Baker, 1993)

Text status: translationese in MT

- Popović (2020) analyzed such text features as sentence length, mean word length, lexical variety, morpho-syntactic variety, or lexical density, in relation to research questions regarding influence of expertise and different cohorts, and influence of native language and translation direction
- Kurokawa et al. (2019) trained an equally performant translation model on a fifth of the data size when classifying the training data according to whether they were from originals or translations prior to using them in the training phase, as opposed to training their model on all data available regardless of their status. (Čulo 2014: 202)

Text status: translationese in MT

- Markus Freitag: Original or Translated? A Causal Analysis of the Impact of Translationese on Machine Translation Performance (2022, they study the effect of the train-test direction match and data-model direction match on the MT performance and they provide a set of suggestions for MT training and evaluation
- In 2020, Yvette Graham, Barry Haddow, and Philipp Koehn described Statistical Power and Translationese in Machine Translation Evaluation.

Potential sources of translation difficulties

- Equivalence
 - **at word level (lexical meaning, non-equivalence)**
 - above word level (collocations, idioms and fixed expressions)
 - grammatical equivalence (grammatical categories)
 - **textual equivalence: thematic and information structures (functional sentence perspective)**
 - **textual equivalence: cohesion (reference, substitution, ellipsis)**
 - **pragmatic equivalence (coherence, implicature) (Baker, 2018)**

Potential sources of translation difficulties

- “The division of language into seemingly self-contained areas such as **words, grammar, and text** is artificial and open to question. For one thing, the areas are **not discrete**: it is virtually impossible to say where the concerns of one area end and those of another begin. Moreover, decisions taken at, say, the level of the word or grammatical category during the course of translation are influenced by the perceived **function** and **purpose** of both the original text and the translation and have implications for the discourse as a whole. But artificial as it is, the division of language into discrete areas is useful for the purposes of **analysis** and, provided we are aware that it is adopted merely as a measure of convenience, it can help to **pinpoint potential areas of difficulty in translation.**” (Baker, 2018: 5)

Word level (lexical meaning, non-equivalence)

- The smallest unit carrying individual meaning?
- No one-to-one relationship between word and meaning
- Tennis player – tenista / tenistka
- Tennis players – tenisté / tenisti // tenisté a tenistky / tenisti a tenistky // tenistky a tenisté // tenistky a tenisti
- not only meaning, but also style and/or word formation (grammar) and/or word order (grammar) and/or pragmatics (gender)
- lexical meaning: “nobody knows” 😊
- the specific value it has in a particular linguistic system and the ‘personality’ it acquires through usage within that system (Baker, 2018)

Word level (lexical meaning, non-equivalence)

- **Lexical, and propositional vs expressive meaning**
- *Visage (en) – vizáž (cs) – die Visage (de)*

- **Presupposed meaning:** co-occurrence restrictions
- *Brush your teeth (en) – čistit, mýt (clean, wash) (cs) – putzen (polish) (de)*

- **Evoked meaning** arises from dialect and register variation

Word level (lexical meaning, non-equivalence)

- **Dialect: geographical, sociological**
- **Localisation? Difficult for translators, what dialect / register should they choose?**
- variations in grammar (Czech)
- variations in vocabulary (German, English)
- variations in prosody
- variations in usage patterns
- likely will not have its own written literature
- likely specific to a region
- possibly specific to the social class of speakers

Word level (lexical meaning, non-equivalence)

- non-equivalence: the target language has no direct equivalent for a word which occurs in the source text
- Many strategies – equivalent effect
- Translation by a more general word (superordinate)
- Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word
- Translation by cultural substitution

Textual equivalence

- in English, the grammatical principle (i.e. syntax) plays the leading role in the hierarchy of word order principles (Mathesius, quoted in Firbas, 1974: 17)
- In English, the lack of a differentiated morphemic system in many areas places heavy constraints on word-order patterns. In Czech, with its richer morphemic systems, word order can follow the functional sentence perspective much more faithfully. (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981: 75)

Textual equivalence: cohesion (reference, substitution, ellipsis)

- cohesion is the network of surface relations which link words and expressions to other words and expressions in a text

Pragmatic equivalence (coherence, implicature)

- text is the verbalized expression of an author's intention as understood by the translator as reader, who then recreates this whole for another readership in another culture (Snell-Hornby, 1988: 2)
- coherence is the network of conceptual relations which underlie the surface text

Pragmatic equivalence (coherence, implicature)

- a highly cohesive text which is nevertheless incoherent
- *This is my cat. The neighbour's cat escaped in the night. The nights are cold in this time of year. The year lasts twelve months. We go to the cottage every month. Cottage has seven letters.*

Pragmatic equivalence (coherence, implicature)

- Depends on the individual situation of the talking person, but also strongly on the cultural context.
- *A: Can you tell me how to get to the train station?*
- *B: Yes, I can.*
- (B did not understand the implicature.)

Translation criticism: the potentials and limitations

- stereotypical statements on the aptness or the fluency of the translation (Levý, 2011)
- many TQA models (in TS, in translation agencies, etc.)
- In TS: a number of translation quality assessment models, e.g. Reiss (2014) or House (2014)

Translation criticism: the potentials and limitations

- modern TS: evaluation of translation quality (as a theoretical discipline and a practical activity)
- translation quality is not an **absolute** value, but a **relative** value, dependent on many factors
- Katharina Reiss: No critique without a comparison with the original!
- The specific individual translation should be evaluated by objective (= verifiable) and relevant criteria. Only then is it possible for the more or less spontaneous practice of translation criticism to meet the benchmark of an objective translation critique (Reiss, 2014: 4)
- The type of text is the primary factor influencing the translator's choice of a proper translation method.

Translation criticism: the potentials and limitations

- K. Reiss: text type and translation method (literary categories)
 - informative
 - expressive
 - operative
 - (audio-medial)
- linguistic context + extra-linguistic situation (pragmatics)

Translation criticism: the potentials and limitations

- The linguistic components (categories)
- semantic elements (not only micro-, but also macro-context!): polysemy, homonymy, additions and omissions
- lexical elements: terms, idioms, false friends, non-equivalent vocabulary, names, metaphors, proverbs
- grammatical elements: in accordance with the target language usage?
- stylistic elements: idiolect, and especially deviations of the author's style from common language norms

Translation criticism: the potentials and limitations

- The extra-linguistic (pragmatic) determinants
- subject, time, place, audience, speaker, affective implications
- Limitations: adaptations (to which extent are we able to speak about translation?)

Problems?

- quality of the source text
- GIGO (garbage in, garbage out)

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Discussion

- documentary vs instrumental translation in MT
- original vs translated text
- translation by native and non-native speakers
- pragmatics: cultural and social context
- quality of the source text

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- Thank you!