



The Translator's Approach – Introduction to Translational Hermeneutics

Theory and Examples from Practice

Radegundis Stolze

F Frank & Timme

Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur

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Introduction

This book is an introduction to the theory of translational hermeneutics and will explain the hermeneutical foundations of translation as a human activity. Translating is understood, here, as the human task of faithfully presenting a text's message in another language for readers in a different culture. What is needed for the translating person is to know how to cope with any new text to be translated, independently from its domain. A strict methodology for this strategic process has not yet been found in Translation Studies, and maybe it isn't even possible in human translation. If so, machine translation systems could easily take over.

In a normal professional situation, for instance in the language industry, translators are constantly faced with different types of texts. In today's market, highest flexibility, quick adjustment to new tasks, and a very broad knowledge of elements in the globalized world is required. Often, translators are the only non-specialists in the whole communication process to be enabled by translation, while authors and even target readers may be members of a similar group sharing the same interests. The task of creating a presence for the message in a translation means to authentically continue the communication initiated by the original text and intended between author and readers across the language barrier. The core problem is: how can one understand that message, how can one enter in that strange world of discourse? And how will one find the right words for it?

The paradigm for personalized translation activity is based on the modern language philosophy of hermeneutics, and the book aims to explain the hermeneutical outlook to the task of translating, which starts from the viewpoint of a translator as a socially embodied individual. Translation is conceived of as an assignment yet to be completed, and all translational decisions are to the full discretion of the translator. He or she is alone responsible, and this responsibility calls for critical reflection.

There are two ways of tackling with the practical problem of translation, either a methodology-based one, or a decision-based one. The problem with methodology is that it tends to be 'objective' and neglects the subjective parts in a translator. Descriptive approaches only tell us what has already been done elsewhere,

while prescriptive approaches offer answers before any questions have been raised. This book has originated out of the author's unsatisfactory experience of traditional translation teaching where a great amount of examples from ready-made translations were presented and discussed, but this very often did not help to solve the problems at hand in a new translation assignment.

The cognitive aspect of translation has been taken for granted so far. In present-day Translation Studies (TS), we find a lot of descriptive studies focusing on so-called translation universals observed *post festum*, such as 'clarification', 'expansion', 'ennoblement of style' etc. that are based on the comparison of language structures in the target text (TT) and the source text (ST), without questioning any possible reasons for the observed data. There is also a great variety of studies discussing the cultural pressures supposedly governing translation, and the sociological effects of translations as products of a power struggle. Strangely enough, there is no questioning whether the translators did their job well and managed or at least tried to understand their texts, or whether this is at all possible.

Whilst various translation methods have already been developed in the academic literature, the decision-making process for translating was not yet explained sufficiently. The translator's strategy varies constantly, depending on the given knowledge base and its growth. A person's situated cognition is flexible and thus strangles all rules. That means, in every single case one would have to design one's strategy anew, and the translator may rely more on the own competence than on the application of any given method. For this purpose we need some reference points for orientation.

The book therefore discusses the medial character of translational reading in order to understand a text, and combines it with the text-processing activity debated in cognitive science and rhetoric. The question of how to transcend the familiar world of one's given knowledge and to enter the strange world seen in the translation texts is discussed here in its phenomenological significance. But translation does not stop there. The core issue of how to find the right words for a message once understood, and how to revise one's solutions according to rhetorical goals in view of the target text's purpose is then taken up, presenting the relevant fields of attention in the translator's approach. Saying that translation is

“quasi the same ideas expressed in other words” (Eco 2006) is not enough. The issue is to describe that process of searching linguistically in order to find criteria for backing-up one’s translational decisions, both in technical communication and in literature. Whereas understanding a text is a holistic, global, schematic act of cognitive processing, the production of a translation text in a target language will concentrate on language details including readers’ expectations.

The lines of orientation in translational reading, such as the situative background, the discourse field, the meaning dimension, and the predicative mode as visible in the source text are discussed and confronted with fields of attention in translational writing, such as genre, coherence, stylistics, and function. Translation is described, here, as a co-authored text production in the sense of a social service for the purpose of intercultural communication, rather than an inter-linguistic transfer. Finally, the results concerning prioritizing of translation problems, quality assessment, the necessary life-long learning, and the intellectual growth of the competent translator is mentioned.

The translator’s approach to texts of various kinds, as outlined here, will be explained at the end with examples from both literature and specialist translation in the language pair of English and German. But this translator-centered approach is not language-specific, as it discusses elements of a translation competence in general. Comparable ideas are today, often with a different terminology, discussed in cognitive science, game theory, relevance theory, complexity theory, creativity research and process research. We will refer to relevant studies, where appropriate.

Even if producing practical advice is not the interest of theory, it is true that theory will give the adequate framework for practice, and various theories of translation may render different practical behavior. Therefore it is worth occupying oneself with theory in order to empower the translators for their practical work. Underlying this book is the notion that knowledge of theory can affect the way we translate. Professionalism is characterized by expertise in one’s work and the ability to critically reflect on it.

Darmstadt, April 2011

1 In search of a new paradigm in Translation Studies

1.1 Practice, theory, research and knowledge

As the intended presentation will focus on both aspects of theory and of practice, it is necessary to first of all clarify some terms. Often their interrelationship is not clear.

Practice is the field of concrete activity in the profession. In the field of language this includes translators, interpreters, technical authors; among linguists it includes language teachers, journalists, media reporters, university professors in language studies, advertisement texters etc. The concrete problems comprise the tools to use, such as special dictionaries, computers, translation memories, automatic translation systems, literature, libraries, but also the personal role in project management and the working team, the proper time management, the behavior with clients and colleagues, payment, accounting modalities, tax issues and salary. The goal is professionalism in the activity.

Professionalism is a quality that characterizes workers who not only do their job well, but who can also reflect on it with self-criticism. They dispose of adequate specialist knowledge, use the adequate tools and are ready for investment and constant further training. They can generalize problems and work methodically. They can back-up their decisions with self-confidence in a scholarly manner, but they also developed a time-saving routine. This attitude requires expert knowledge, which is not yet given in students.

Knowledge is an economic good and is the basis of working in theory and practice (Budin 2002). Expert knowledge may be described in detail:

Ability for something is the condition for knowledge, it's the born-in talent to learn something and to perform it.

Proficiency is an implicit, subjective knowledge about certain activities, we may also call it skill.

Competence means the totality of all object-related and methodical forms of knowledge on a certain process which we are performing in our professional activities consciously and which a certain target (experts, specialists).

Social and intercultural action knowledge means that you have to know your own culture and also the foreign one in order to become aware of communication barriers, to react adequately in the encounter with foreigners, to well deal with clients and to lead negotiations.

Knowledge on language and communication is a nearly perfect knowledge about the languages involved in translation. This includes grammar, functional stylistics, lexicon, text type conventions, rules of comprehensibility, special signs (semiotic knowledge) and other extra-lingual communication means (illustration, text arrangement, etc.). Simply studying a foreign language is not sufficient for proper translation.

Terminology knowledge refers to specialist terms in domains of science and humanities. Terminology is the collection of special words, i.e. terms with specific concepts as their word meaning.

Domain-specific knowledge: as specialization is growing in all scientific disciplines, in the fields of economy, law, social sciences and all engineering fields, we are forced to acquire domain-specific knowledge on the one hand, and to specialize in certain areas on the other hand.

Experts are different from lay persons because they are not only intuitively able to do something well, they have expressly studied and learnt it. The concept of expertise is relative, because everybody can become an expert in a field, the competence is developing constantly through life-long learning (Kalverkämper 1998:24).

Theory stems from gr. *θεωρία*, the vision, contemplation. Theory is the complex of ideas regarding a scientific field, the modeling. The theoretician is a scholar who deals principally with an issue. Regarding translation the issue is about “what translation is”, how this functions, and not about any concrete working instructions or the development of practical tools. The goal of theory is to find definitions, and for this purpose hypotheses are created which then are being examined. This is the place of basic research. Theory cannot give prescriptive propositions for practical action. It isn't even sure whether theoretical insights have any effect for practice. The occupation with theory, however, is legitimate because the human interest in things simply wants to know, what is behind the phenomena and observable procedures. And a new theory as a novel view of the object may eventually also generate different practice. Theory is based on research.

Research is the basis for developing theories. It includes such methods and means that are applied in order to develop theoretical models, to describe objects and to verify hypotheses. Research is either *descriptive* when objects are analyzed and compared in case studies, or *empirical* when questionnaires, protocols or corpora are evaluated, or *experimental* when laboratory designs are made to test reactions or when machines monitor processes of action. A triangulation of various methods is considered as fruitful, because qualitative data from interviews can be strengthened by quantitative data collected empirically (Hansen 2006:23).

1.2 The goal of faithful translation

Translation has been used ever since humans communicated with one another. And translation was also the subject where thinking about the act of translating has initiated.¹ Translation is not communication in itself, rather it is a social service of mediating in order to enable communication. Texts are being made accessible to readers in another language because those cannot understand the original, either for reasons of historical distance or for linguistic barriers. This view includes the concept that a translation substitutes the original and that a translator becomes a co-author of the text's message, and is burdened with the responsibility to translate faithfully. Readers assume that a translation transports the original text's content. Otherwise it would not make sense to read a translation.

We are discussing here the issue of how a translator can cope with this task of faithful translation, which is a very important task in society and should not be subdued. We doubt whether W. Wilss is right in his statement: "Both, TS and translators in their professional work, have to accept the fact that the essence of translation is relativization and compromise [...], and this awareness sometimes dampens our translation motivation" (Wilss 1996:38).² Not at all, we would say,

¹ See *Translators through History*. Edited and directed by Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth (1995).

² He holds a pessimistic assumption: "Metaphorically speaking, translators are a kind of 'displaced persons' who plug their own communication system into the translation network, hoping that in the course of their activity they can gradually filter out the uncer-

translators are workers with their own professional competence and ability of judgment.

As this is difficult, though, practitioners repeatedly urge translation theorists to equip them efficiently with practical hints on how to translate. But this is not possible, since theory is the legitimate attempt to just view, analyze and describe a problem – for instance the “act of translating” or “what translation is” or “the factors of the translation process” – in order to create novel insights that perhaps would some day generate new approaches for the task of teaching translation.

We distinguish between *translating* as the act of rendering written input from one language by means of another language in written form (and thus revisable) with the product of a *translation*, and *interpreting* as the act of oral rendering a message heard in another language. *Interpretation*, on the contrary, is the explanatory exegesis of a foreign text from a certain viewpoint, mostly in religious or ideological environments. In general language, “interpretation” is a synonym for “understanding”.

Translation Studies have seen considerable changes during the past fifty years as they gradually developed into a discipline. The scholarly interest shifted from a description of language differences to the social role of translation in the literary context, and to an analysis of the translation process. Over the years, various translation theories have appeared.³ It is a difference whether you conceive translation as a linguistic transfer procedure, rather than an intercultural mediation, or as a power struggle for meanings. The translator’s approach to the given task will be a different one in each case, because he or she will direct attention to varying aspects.

The early translators reflected on their activity and sought for some explanation for their decisions regarding the goal of faithful translation. Following St. Jerome, who translated the Greek Bible into Latin, medieval translators developed tools for very precise and literal translations in order to be faithful to the original text, what later even influenced the translation of secular texts (Brenner 1998:6).

tainty which makes itself unpleasantly felt in many translation processes” (Wilss 1996:142f).

³ See *Übersetzungstheorien. Eine Einführung*. 5th edition (Stolze 2008).

In the 16th century, important impulses for translation came from Martin Luther with his German translation of the Bible. In his reflection on translation⁴ he motivated his choice of a non literal target-oriented translation even for the holy text to confer the message in a powerful way. He created the term *verdeutschen*, that means to speak German so that people may understand. Such a translation is of course ‘free’, it may transform the original at a certain point. On the other hand, the so-called ‘faithful translations’ were seen philologically as sticking to the original’s word structure, and this is then *verfremdend* (alienating), it makes the text ‘strange’ for the target reader.

That old tension between the two methods of “free translation” and “faithful translation” has brought along the demand for clear rules of translation, not least for the purpose of educating translators. For centuries, the struggle between these two methods characterized the theoretical debate, where theory was deducted from practice as its foundation and motivation. The commentaries on translations give evidence of the translators’ difficulties, but this did not grow soon into a real translation theory. In language courses in school until today, students are being taught to translate “as literally as possible and as freely as necessary”. But this is a circle, since “possible” and “necessary” are interrelated plausibilities, no definitions.

In the 18th century, A. Tytler gained some importance. He put up the following valid requirements for a good translation: knowledge of both languages, insight of the subject discussed, good style, and an understanding of the author’s intention. He described the relationship between translation and original (Tytler 1797:16):

- I. That the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.
- II. That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
- III. That the translation should have all the ease of the original composition.

This statement clearly is a description of the individual goal a translator as the author of a target text would set himself, just as all the self-reflecting translators

⁴ Cf. “Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen” (1530), in: Störig (1973:1-13). – See a comment on that in Lefevere (1977:7-9).

did. Still recently it was proposed that translation competence, understood in its totality, would cover individual sub-competences, for example: (1) language competence, (2) textual competence, (3) subject competence, (4) cultural competence, (5) transfer competence (Neubert 2000:10). In its generalization, this is not very different from what Tytler had established.

Until the 19th century, translation was considered an art, and the assignment was always to make audible “the author’s voice”, that is to follow the ideal of a philologically faithful translation. The German Romanticism had formulated a certain understanding of the “genius of a language” as the medium of expressing a people’s character, presenting examples of untranslatable words (Humboldt 1836/1971). As a part of the culture, all languages are different from each other, and translation, in the end, would remain a vain effort. Language and culture constitute a closed world for the intellect, and the language even affects the way of thinking. A classical text, a piece of art, was conceived of as the external appearance of a nation’s spirit, because writing is identical with the language. When we see it this way, then indeed translation will become rather impossible.

It was only in the 20th century, with the development of modern linguistics, that the focus has shifted. Language is seen now as a semiotic system and the objective is to design a general methodology of translation, with a view to automation.⁵ Nonetheless, the human translator is still needed, as the amount of texts to be translated worldwide is growing tremendously in size and variation.

Thoughts about translation originated – as we have said – in the self-reflection by individual translators who had set their own goals. It is a misunderstanding when A. Chesterman collects various similar observations – such as “the translation should resemble the original” or “the translation should show a good style and avoid unusual words and expressions” – and suggests: “Hidden beneath these prescriptive statements about the universal characteristics of good translations there actually lie predictive hypotheses” (2004:4) (see also Chesterman 1993). No, this is not necessarily so, even if many might have understood it in

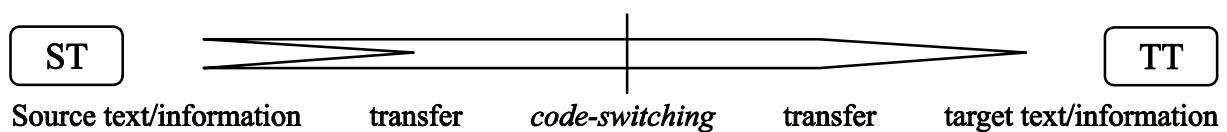
⁵ The “science of translation” was initially used as an auxiliary discipline for the target of formalizing language in a way as to make texts translatable by computers. Though the target of Fully Automatic High Quality Translation (FAHQT) has not yet been reached even today, many useful applications have been determined for huge technical texts of a similar structure.

that sense. These statements just constitute individual goals set by translators for themselves and used as a justification for their work.

1.3 The first paradigm of interlingual transfer for equivalence

The modern scientific analysis of languages gave a new perspective. Language as a means of communication was no longer seen merely as a mirror of individuality, but as a medium of expressing one's thoughts in a rational way. Language appears as a system of signs to be analyzed, and research now focuses on language structures rather than peoples' ideology. On the surface, translation appears as an exchange of source language material by target language material (Catford 1965; Kade 1968).

On a purely linguistic basis Catford (1965) dealt with "translation shifts" defining them as "departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL" (1965:73).⁶ And this view is still valid thirty years later: „Translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation“ (Venuti 1995:17). Thus translation was defined as an "interlingual transfer" of information, requiring a "code-switching process" in the channel of communication in order to preserve the information unaltered (Wilss 1996:5). This created the paradigm of translation as an uni-directional "transfer" of information from one language to the other:



The resulting "problem of translation" was defined as the task of obtaining "translation equivalence" between two languages with different signs and structures, and there were extracted four kinds of "potential equivalents", such as the *one-to-one (total equivalent)*, *one-to-many (facultative equivalent)*, *one-to-part*

⁶ Snell-Hornby (1988:19) has criticised that Catford's definition of textual equivalence were "circular", his theory's reliance on bilingual informants "hopelessly inadequate", and his example sentences "isolated and even absurdly simplistic". She asserts that the translation process cannot simply be reduced to a linguistic exercise.

(*approximate equivalent*), *one-to-zero (non-equivalence)* or *gap* (Koller 1992:229). This definition regards individual lexemes, and later on it found wide application in contrastive linguistics and lexicography.

The discipline of Contrastive Linguistics, originally designed for explaining difficulties in learning a foreign language, also influenced Translation Science as it offered the instruments for translation criticism and error analysis (Spillner 1990), and this was mainly based on comparative stylistics first developed in Quebec. The problem of an information transfer over a code-switching led to the discipline of *Stylistique comparée* describing the transfer in a particular language pair. There are studies for English-French (Vinay & Darbelnet 1958) and German-French (Malblanc 1968) translation, inferring some “transfer procedures”.

Comparing existing translations with their source texts, they described seven procedures supposedly applied by the translators, namely *emprunt*, *calque*, *traduction littérale*, *transposition*, *modulation*, *équivalence*, *adaptation*. The first three are a substitution of single words, *transposition* and *modulation* are a non-literal paraphrasing of units for stylistic reasons, *adaptation* is a shift for extratextual reasons, *équivalence* a substitution of idiomatic phrases. These procedures are seen as reactions to the ST structure on the syntagmatic level.

Translation Science thus could be defined as the task “to develop operating procedures which will make it possible to factor the transfer from a SLT [sc. source language text] to a TLT against the background of the intended meaning in the SL, to organize the individual factors in a plausible frame of reference and extract from them a logical model of description and explanation...” (Wilss 1982:63). This equivalence-based concept is still maintained in Wilss (1996) where we read:

Translation is a specific kind of linguistic information processing based on the principle of code-switching. It is basically characterized by the interaction of three communicating partners, the ST author, the translator, and the TT reader (1996:5). – Except for instances where it has become a routine, translation is a form of linguistic performance requiring subtle skills of ST/TT synchronization on all translationally relevant levels. In accomplishing a translation, translators are aware that they face the ST as a “silent object”. They must first penetrate it receptively (semasiologically) and then reproduce it in the TL (onomasiologically) (ibid. 9). – As a “higher-level” discipline, building upon the insights of contrastive linguistics and sharing with it the notion of “tertium comparationis”, TS [sc. Transla-

tion Studies] seeks optimally inclusive rules of ST/TT coordination (10). – A specific feature of translator activities is that they are in principle norm-determined (42). – In order to help the translator, TS must develop procedural standards on an empirical basis. The primary aim of TS is to work out efficient strategies and norms of behavior... (44f). – The main property of translation is coordination between the ST and the unfolding TT at the semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic levels. Unless a translator can proceed in a predominantly or all-out routinized manner, this coordination is a demanding task, although (or because?) translation is essentially a reproductive activity (45). – Translators do not produce a primary text; they produce a secondary text. Translators do not really have a decisive say in performing their task; they are bound by the situational demands to which they are exposed (46f). – We all agree that translation is a goal-directed activity which basically consists of a decoding and an encoding, or more precisely, “recoding phase” (recoding, because the ST has already been encoded in the SL) (78). – What characterizes translation activity is the fact that it is immersed in a basic framework of mental activity - the perception, the reorganization (restructuring), and the evaluation of strings of linguistic symbols (126). – ...translation is a mental activity, in which occur internalized, “elementary” translation procedures, such as literal translation, and more intricate transfer procedures, such as obligatory or optional non-literal transfer procedures (137). – Certainly, the recognition of the centrality of the lexicon in translator performance and the (near-)automatic reproduction of textual configurations are top targets for translation efficiency (137). – Translation is a situationally optimal synchronization of the ST and the TT (175).

The idea seems to be that TS has to “analyze data” (ibid. 57) by comparing target texts with source texts in order to detect hidden rules of translational behavior that might then be operationalized and taught in translation pedagogics. Translation is defined „as the quoting, in sequential chunks, of the wording of a written, oral or signed text, with an imitative purpose” (Mossop 1998:231). The theoretical basis for this collecting data is to be found in G. Toury (1995) who called for descriptive analyses in order to better define the discipline of Translation Studies, and to state principles of translating in the sense of “translational norms” (ibid., 58). But the idea was there earlier.

Rooted in general linguistics, E. Nida (1964) has developed a guideline for translators based on the syntagmatic analysis of ambiguous structures for transfer and restructuring. His principle of a “dynamic equivalence” (Nida/Taber 1974:13) derives from a thorough analysis of semantic and syntagmatic structures, and it is situated within the paradigm of interlingual transfer in translation. He even expressly talks of “transfer” when he suggests to find the “closest natu-

ral equivalent” (ibid. 13) by translating the deep structure of “kernel sentences” and then rearranging them on the surface level in the other language (ibid. 33). The problem with Nida’s program is the fact that he only focuses on syntagmas, without taking any larger sentence structures or even a paragraph into consideration.⁷ We have to admit, though, that Nida’s concept was directed towards translating for mission at exotic places with less developed languages, and this is still applied today in respective bible translation projects.⁸

Translation is seen didactically as a series of technical procedures to be applied, and this has decisively determined the orientation of translation pedagogics in the 1960s and onwards. Many translation handbooks even today still follow this language-pair model, because it is also a useful instrument for translation evaluation in the class room. J. House (1997) has developed a model of translation quality assessment aiming at a “scientific translation critique”. Its purpose is to measure whether a translation has an (optimal) equivalence relationship to the original on all linguistic levels, regarding words and sentences in terms of their deviation from a literal translation. She argues that ST and TT should match one another in function: “Translation is constituted by a ‘double-binding’ relationship both to its source and to the communicative conditions of the receiving lingua-culture, and it is the concept of equivalence which catches this relationship” (House 1997:29).

House suggests that it is possible to characterize the function of a text by determining “situational dimensions” in the ST. The translation should employ equivalent situational-dimensional means to achieve the function wanted (ibid., 49). The idea is to find instruments for comparing texts and translations in every

⁷ There are various examples of ambiguous biblical phrases that follow Greek language structure, and which, according to Nida, should be disambiguated in a translation:

the will of God	God wills
the God of peace	God causes/produces peace
the Holy Spirit of promise	God promised the Holy Spirit
the word of truth	the word is true
the riches of his grace	he shows grace richly/abundantly
the day of the preparation	the day when (people) prepare (for the Sabbath).

⁸ Meanwhile Nida has left the strict, biased syntactical view, when he notes (1985:119): “We are no longer limited to the idea that meaning is centred in words or even in grammatical distinctions. Everything in language, from sound symbolism to complex rhetorical structures carries meaning.”

linguistic detail so to determine the degree of equivalence between both. This later on could perhaps serve to operationalize “translation rules” in the sense of a descriptive presentation of the adequate translation reaction to source text structures, based on a systematic linguistic-pragmatic analysis of the language function in the situational context.⁹

Whereas Nida’s concern had been the issue of a faithful representation of the message, though in a different form, in order to gain equal response to it amongst the target language audience, the focus shifted totally towards the addressees in other functional approaches. The so-called Skopos Theory sees translation as part of Action Theory and gives highest rank to its purpose, over and above any coherence relationship of the target to the source text (Reiß & Vermeer 1984:119). The general guideline of translation should be its purpose, the question for whom and to which end we are translating (Vermeer 1996a). Even if this is a strong argument for shifts, the reference point of argumentation, still, is the source text structure. In explaining “functionalist approaches”, C. Nord (1991:17/21) discusses for instance the adaptation of lexical or syntactic structures – now called “functional units” – to the system of the target language by means of translation procedures such as “modulation” and “transposition” known already from *Stylistique comparée*.

In stressing the need for “creativity” in the translator regarding his or her linguistic decisions for purposeful translation, Kußmaul (1995) designed a model of training the translator. Based on a cognitive foundation of translation teaching, his interest is “to explore various aspects of the methodology of translation” (1995:2).¹⁰ A didactic learning effect is seen in the critical discussion of the re-

⁹ In order to compare TT and ST, a “textual profile” has to be established. For example: “The absence of elliptical clauses or comment parentheses” is a sign of written language, “e.g. in an information letter” (House 1997:49f). Or: “The presence of strong textual cohesion due to the employment of several mechanisms of theme-dynamics and clausal linkage” is a textual means of indicating the province as the situational embedding.

¹⁰ Kußmaul (1995) discusses the following topics:
What goes on in the translator’s mind?
Creativity in translation
Pragmatic analysis
The analysis of meaning
Text analysis and the use of dictionaries
Evaluation and errors
A summary of strategies.

sults, however without any categories of evaluation. The interest is in analyzing the origination of formulations that are structurally different from the source text as the point of reference. Any non-literal translation, thus, is defined by him as “creative”, just because it implies a modification of the form, compared with the original: “As soon as we have to realize such changes in virtue of linguistic constraints, we are creative to a certain extent” (Kußmaul 2000:22, *my translation*). And he again recalls the procedures of “transposition” and “paraphrase” invented by Stylistique comparée, even defining a scale of “more or less creativity” (ibid. 29).

In the French tradition, there has been designed the alternative of “sourciers” (source-text related types of translators) and the “ciblistes” (those focusing on the target text). The former tend more to stick to the ST structure in a literal translation preserving form and sense, while the latter create deviant new formulations to present the meaning. Unfortunately, J.-R. LADMIRAL himself, the author of those terms, does not give a concise definition of what he thinks “translation is”. In an article dealing with “a pluralistic concept” of translation (1995) he argues on a pragmatic level,¹¹ but he fails to give a definition of “translation”, only an account of its instances. LADMIRAL himself, though, seems to be a cibliste. In view of the source text-oriented translators (*sourciers*) he speaks of an utopian attempt to “repeat the original text” (1995:417; 1993:297), but his account does not explain how to make it better and still leaves us without a definition of the term *translation*. And this deceptive state is neither resolved five years later in his article on the “aporetic concept of translation” (2002), where he even defines translation as “equivalence”, just to say that this is a tautology (2002:126; 1995:417). He also mentions the problem of literalness for a “truthful translation” (2002:123) as had been requested by the poet Walter Benjamin.¹² Obvious-

¹¹ LADMIRAL differentiates among spontaneous translation L2-L1 by pupils in foreign language acquisition (surcodage mental, 1995:410), the pedagogic translation exercises in schools (version, thème), the professional translation of literary and technical texts in the sense of presenting a “real text”. Literary translation is subdivided into the translation of the works of literary art, philosophical texts, and holy scripture (ibid., 423).

¹² In fact, Benjamin had stated in 1923: “Rather the meaning of fidelity, which is assured by literalness, is that the great longing for the complementarity of languages should make itself felt in the work. Real translation is transparent, it does not hide the original...” (Lefevre 1977:102).

ly, this approach too is neither able to give a convincing definition of what translation is nor to oppose the circular statement put up by Ladmiral: « Tous les arguments contre la traduction se résument en un seul: elle n'est pas l'original ».¹³ Even if the translation “is” not the original, it functions “as it”. Ladmiral’s repeated attempts to find a semantic definition of the concept of translation are fruitless.

The relationship between languages has now been analyzed to every respect, on the theoretical level (*langue*) as well as on the practical level (*parole*), when translations are being compared with their originals. The framework of an “interlingual transfer” is never transgressed. And this is even understandable since, at surface level, the target and the source text actually do show some similarities in their wording and structure. An equivalence-based textual criticism will always show some “shifts”, but such resulting formal deviations cannot be taken as a theory of translation.

1.4 Descriptive and prescriptive rules in translation

Wilss (1996:10) describes the task of TS to operationalize “rules of ST/TT coordination”. A “rule” has various meanings:

1. governing power, 2. an authoritative direction, 3. a customary course of action, 4. a statement that describes what is true in most or all cases, 5. a standard procedure, and others (*The American Heritage Dictionary*).

The search for supposedly basic principles of translation in a language pair was not always systematic. P. Newmark, in his numerous books on translation, renders uncountable examples of translation cases called “rules” (Newmark 1973; 1979), obviously thinking that this collection would lead to a general insight in how to address the task. His micro-stylistic approach is clear when he writes (1980:127):

¹³ *Translation*: “All arguments against translation are resumed in one only: it is not the original.” See Ladmiral (1995:418; 2002:127) citing here both times Georges Mounin (1955:7).

You can no more teach someone to become a good translator than to become a good linguist. All you can do is to give some hints, give some practice and if you're lucky, show more or less how the job can be done.¹⁴

Newmark's "rules" appear subjective and proto-academic. Most of them are circular comments presented by the teacher in a prescriptive way, but they cannot serve as a general guideline. As every text is different, and as the "case studies" always just refer to one specific case, this is not very illuminating. But how can individual goals and achievements become general rules of translation? The reason lies in the structural focus of argumentation.

The idea is to link translational effects to text structures as their cause (Chesterman 1998), because in the interlingual transfer paradigm translations seem to be just a reaction to source text structures. Texts are being personalized, and researchers analyze text types as "a general translational behavior of texts" (Reiß/Vermeer 1984:204)¹⁵, in order to describe the "factor model of translation" (ibid. 148). In reality it is the translators who show a certain behavior.

Descriptive Translation Studies set out to analyze the behavior pattern of translators by analyzing their results. "Real science", according to Toury (1995:1), is only empirical science. He requests to "do more empirical research" (Toury 2004:23), obviously meant for later on constructing some "rules" found, that could be taught in the classroom for translators. He accepts the forming of a theory if the empirical studies lead "toward the establishment of a full-fledged, multi-facet theory of translation of a high explanatory power" (Toury 1995:240).

¹⁴ Newmark obviously thought that there are as many types of translations as there are texts. The title of one of his articles reads: "Twenty-three Restricted Rules of Translation" (1973). Maybe those didn't seem sufficient, so he wrote another article: "Sixty Further Propositions on Translation" (1979). One "rule" thereof reads: "42. Translation balancing-act – On the one hand, the translator should not use a synonym where a translation will do, in particular, where the translation is a 'transparently' faithful cognate or the standard dictionary equivalent and has no special connotations. On the other hand, he should not translate one-to-one where one-to-two or -three would do better, nor, reproduce a SL syntactic structure where he can recast the sentence more neatly."

¹⁵ *Read:* "Es ist für die Translatologie, deren Gegenstände u.a. die Erforschung der Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten der Übersetzung ist, eine der Textsortenklassifikation vorgeschaltete, gröbere und abstraktere Differenzierung von Texten im Blick auf ein *generelles translatorisches Verhalten* von Texten von Interesse, die Klassifikation nach Texttypen."

However, all this appears as a naïve inductionism, since any interpretation of data implies subjective aspects as well. The way we perceive some things, or whether we perceive them at all, is determined by our own experience, our own perspective as a researcher. The pure, ‘objective’ collection of data does not make sense, unless they were purposefully collected on the basis of a specific research hypothesis. D. Gile (1991:154) calls for “real research” by the extensive collection of data, even without much hypothesis beforehand: “Systematic observation of reality is a valuable scientific act *per se*” (ibid. 166). And even he sticks to the old idea of textual transfer when he defines translation as “a process P acting on an input I and producing an output O, where both input and output are entirely contained in written documents” (ibid. 155).

The bulk of corpus studies works according to this empirical paradigm, when for instance the recurrence of certain collocations is analyzed in translations (Sinclair 1991). Corpus-based methods of enquiry have given impetus to the quest for the so-called translation universals, i.e., “features that typically occur in translated text rather than original utterances and which are not the result of interference from specific linguistic systems” (Baker 1993:243). Explicitation, simplification, normalization, the “law of interference” and “the unique items hypothesis” have been investigated with monolingual comparable and bilingual parallel corpora.¹⁶ E. Steiner (2004:17) makes it clear that corpus analyses are being used for translation criticism – showing patterns of translational behavior (Teich 2003), but no instruction for translating itself as a task. The systematical description of given translational solutions focuses on facts on the surface level, what for some researchers even intuitively turns into prescriptive statements. The idea of “predictive hypotheses” (Chesterman) includes the assumption that “it must be so”, all the more that the mainstream results shown in such corpora confirm that. The problem in such corpora, though – be they large or small – is that it is “dead language material” or a “silent object” (Wilss 1996:9).

On the contrary, utterances by speakers are always marked by the individuality of the respective situation and the speaker’s evolving linguistic proficiency, as well as the knowledge of the individual. Any recorded speech only fixes a past situation. The utterance could well have been pronounced in a totally different

¹⁶ For an overview of corpus studies on universals see Klaudy (2009); Laviosa (2009).

form, as the way people speak is highly unpredictable. What is predictable is only grammar, the correct idiomatic usage of certain syntagmas, what very often not comes to the conscience of the user. A corpus thus fixes momentary “language games” (Wittgenstein 1953:§7) what makes it an arbitrary construct with no strong relevance for any future linguistic behavior. Corpora age quickly, and this reduces their relevance as data-sources for linguistic analysis, and of course as examples for future linguistic activity in particular, in communication just as in translation.

The analysis does not lead to a convincing motivation of such solutions seen, nor to any improvement of them. How should we draw a pattern for future translating activities therefrom? Wittgenstein had pointed out that language is “language in use”, when he called a language-game “the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven” (ibid.). Despite repeated calls for a “collection of rules” for translating, such works have not yet been put on the table. Perhaps, it is not even possible because there are too many exceptions.

We have to distinguish between “prescriptive rules” of methodology and “descriptive rules” of behavior patterns, i.e. between rule description and rule observation. Prescriptive rules are those presented by Newmark, though without any synthesizing order and without answering any questions. Descriptive rules, on the contrary, are a result of empirical analysis, they stem from the experience, that things happen to be the same in various cases (but not in all). They need not become prescriptive rules for the sake of majority. The empirical scientific concept as an analysis of facts or a verification of simulated models of action implies the idea that the problem of how an individual translator approaches his or her work, and which quality standards he or she will apply, were already solved. But this is not at all the case. Translational behavior is not predictable.

The way of dealing with texts to be translated is no direct consequence from the discussion of given examples and methods, as didactics often presupposes. The traditional description of “translation processes” has no other reference points than language structures. However, it is not yet clear whether translational activity in practice really works with such linguistic structures as grammar and syntax. That concept of comparing language structures for the purpose of defining a

model of translation fails its subject. Rightly, Stecconi (2007:15) supports semiotics, because “it redefines the traditional image of translating as transfer”.

The human translator really thinks differently. S/he asks *why* something has been done and whether it could be done better, rather than simply observing *what* and *how* it has been done. Many researchers state that translations are “in principle norm-determined” (Wilss 1996:42; Koller 1992:209). Toury (1995:55) speaks of “norms in translation” which are “acquired by the individual”. He is thinking of social norms and conditions of the translation activity (to be descriptively analyzed in TS) while Wilss thinks of linguistic rules of ST-TT transfer. But translators do not apply such “rules”.

The idea of translation as a rule-governed activity – both descriptively and prescriptively – much influenced by machine translation, appears to us as a completely wrong concept of human translation. Wilss’ book on the “Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behavior” (1996) does not even describe such “behavior”, he only compiles numerous quotations from the literature about the scientific analysis of “knowledge structures” and necessary skills such as translation techniques on the sentence level.

Translation is a process, based on the individual strategy within a social setting, rather than a translator’s quasi automatic behavior as a “response to the ST” (Wilss 1996:99) in view of “operational prediction” (ibid. 31). And “strategy” is a plan for action, rather than rule application. Ladamir (1988) called descriptive approaches a “translation science of yesterday” (*traductologie d’hier*), because it comes too late for the act of translating, but he does not exploit his own idea when he simply stresses the need for translators to decide here: « Condamné à être libre, le traducteur est un décideur [...] dans une alternative stratégique de décision traductive » (1993:291f).¹⁷ Hönig (1993) had already stressed the necessary self-assurance of the translator who may decide by himself and defend his or her solutions.

¹⁷ *Translation: Condemned to freedom, the translator has to decide, in a strategic alternative of translational decision.*