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Maintenance and Convergence in Covert Translation English--German

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This paper presents an overview and some tentative results of the project "Covert Translation –Verdecktes Übersetzen", which is currently carried out at the Research Center "Multilingualism", University of Hamburg. The Center is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Science Foundation) and has been in operation since July 1999. The paper is structured as follows: I will first give the background to the project and describe the research question it is trying to tackle. Secondly, I will present the working hypothesis underlying the investigation conducted by the project’s research team. Thirdly, I will describe the corpus, fourthly the analytic procedure used. Finally, I will present, interpret and discuss some tentative results.

1. Background and Research Questions

One of the consequences of today’s revolutionary advances in information technology and the ensuing globalisation of communication processes is a steady increase in the demand for texts which simultaneously address members of many different linguistic and cultural communities. Such texts are either parallel texts produced independently, often, but not necessarily simultaneously, in several languages, or texts first presented in one language – most frequently English – and later translated "covertly" into other languages, i.e., in such a way as to re-instate in the translated text the original text’s function via the application of a "cultural filter" (House 1977; 1997). This filter is a construct with which those "pragmatic shifts", i.e. those changes in textual norms and conventionalizations that become necessary as the textual material travels through time and space, can be conceptualised, described and explained. For the language pair English and German, which the project initially handles, this filter has been given substance though the results of a number of English-German pragmatic discourse analyses (for a summary see House 1996) as well as analyses of originals and translations (House 1977; 1997), which can be displayed as a set of parameters along which speakers of the two linguistic and cultural communities differ in terms of their habituated communicative choices and preferences. These parameters include orientation towards content vs. orientation towards addressees, explicitness vs. implicitness and directness vs. indirectness.

Given the impact "Global English" has been having on other languages in many influential domains of contemporary life, this adaptation process may now be in a process of change. We therefore ask in this project whether maintenance of target culture norms in covert translation and multilingual text production processes is currently no longer operative such that source and target norms are converging. In other words, we are trying to find out whether the obvious, well-documented and indeed lamented impact global English has on
German (French, Spanish) lexical items and routines and their local "shadow meanings" (Chafe 2000) is now also spreading to more hidden, culturally conditioned conventions of local German (later also French and Spanish) text production. If this were the case, cross-cultural difference would give way to similarity in textual norms and text construction, and a process would be initiated that might eventually result in cross-culturally similar processes of "thinking for writing" (cf. Slobin 1996).

Our work is based – as was the model by House – on systemic-functional theory; it involves reconstructing the cognitive processes involved in producing translations and parallel texts and describing the embeddedness of these texts in their institutional and socio-cultural contexts.

2. Working Hypotheses

German textual norms are adapted to Anglophone ones. These adaptations can be located along parameters of culturally determined communicative preferences such as preferred or dispreferred foci on the interpersonal or the ideational function, and on informational vagueness or specificity as they have emerged from German-English contrastive and translation analyses by the present author. Parametrical changes also entail, we assume, "Anglicisation" in terms of e.g. information structure or word order. Concretely we have set up the following hypotheses (formulated mainly on the basis of English-German contrastive work by House 1997 as well as Clyne 1987, Fabricius-Hansen 1996 and Doherty 1999).

1. A shift from a conventionally strong emphasis in German discourse on the ideational function of language to an Anglophone interpersonal orientation focussing on addressee involvement.
2. A shift from a conventionally strong emphasis on informational explicitness in German texts to Anglophone inference-inducing implicitness and propositional opaqueness.
3. A shift in information structure from packing lexical information densely and integratively in German texts to presenting information in a more loosely linearized, "sentential" way.
4. A shift in word order such that the German Satzklammer with its two discontinuous left and right parts gives way to more continuous, juxtaposed positions of the two parts.

These hypotheses are tested using the following corpus.

3. Corpus

The corpus is a dynamic, implicitly diachronic translation and parallel text corpus. It contains at present texts from three genres: computer instructions, popular science texts, and (external) business communication. These genres were selected because they were deemed to represent areas in which globalisation and internationalisation processes would be most marked. In the first phase of the project work, the texts were first of all prepared for qualitative analysis, i.e., they were scanned, transcribed and segmented according to orthographic utterance units. In order to guarantee comparability of the three genres we have generalised from text-external and text-internal characteristics a textual stretch functioning
as an introduction ("scene setter") for what follows in the body of the text. In the three different genres these stretches were introductory remarks in the computer instructions, letters to shareholders, visions, and mission statements in the economic texts and the opening paragraphs and editorials of popular science texts, treating topics of general socio-political relevance such as AIDS, global warming, etc..

The corpus is made up of three mutually contextualising parts: The Translation Corpus comprises the original English texts and their translations into German. The Parallel Corpus contains English and German authentic texts from the same three genres with comparable topic orientation. The Validation Corpus holds translations from the same three genres into the "opposite direction". Each of these parts splits up within itself into a core and a monitor corpus. The Monitor Corpus contains the total number of texts for that part of the corpus and is open to steady, principled influx. The Core Corpus consists of changing sets of ten texts at a time taken from the Monitor Corpus. They can be picked either randomly or with respect to certain characteristics that are at that moment of interest for investigation (e.g. original, translation, overall topic, genre, time of production, etc.). These are then the samples on which the qualitative analysis is carried out.

The number of texts totals at present approx. 320, comprising about 145000 words. Additionally, there is an extensive collection of background documentation for all three parts of the corpus: text documents and, in particular, in-depth interviews with translators, editors, writers and other persons involved in the text production and reception. Also, to further enrich our analyses, – and possibly very useful for accounting for aspects of "genre mixing" (see below) – we have collected German and English texts, appearing in (newly established) parallel editions of newspapers such as the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and The International Herald Tribune, or The Financial Times and Financial Times Deutschland. The texts are similar in topic orientation to the texts in the corpus. (For a detailed description of our corpus see Baumgarten et al. 2001).

4. Analytic Procedure

Initially we follow a case study approach which involves in-depth analysis and comparison of textual exemplars, i.e. English source texts and German translations as well as English-German pairs of parallel texts. The analysis is carried out form both a micro and a macro perspective, i.e. one constantly moves back and forth between word, phrase, and clause levels and onto larger linguistic units such as paragraphs and the entire text. In our analysis we start from House’s translation model (House 1977; 1997) which is based on Hallidayan systemic-functional theory (Halliday 1994), register linguistics (e.g. Biber 1988; Biber and Finegan 1994), discourse analysis and text linguistics (e.g. Edmondson and House 1981). The ultimate goal of the analysis is the reconstruction of the types of motivated choices the text producer made in order to create this and only this particular text for a particular effect in the "context of situation" enveloping and conditioning the text formation. Halliday (1994) posits three parameters of the "context of situation", which have linguistic consequences: Field, Tenor and Mode, and he assumes that these parameters reflect the kinds of meaning language is structured to make. The aim of systemic-functional analysis is then to demonstrate how (and why) these contextual parameters effect language use, and to identify parts of the language system which realise the different types of contextual information. The underlying claim is that the very structure of language is functionally motivated, and that
language is organised so as to make meanings about Field, Tenor and Mode because these are the meanings human beings need to make in their interactions with the world and with each other (see Halliday 1994, and also Martin 1992 for further details).

Apart from correlating the context parameters with lexicogrammatical patterns, the analysis also links text and context on the discourse-semantic level, the claim being that language is designed to fulfil three particular metafunctions: the ideational (for relating experience), the interpersonal (for creating interpersonal relations), and the textual metafunction (for organizing information in a text), and that each of these metafunctions can be associated with one of the context parameters. In systemic-functional theory, then, any text is always seen as expressing simultaneously these three meaning types.

Since the analysis, using these variables, links a text primarily with its situational micro-context, another concept for linking a text with other texts, and with the larger macro-context of culture and society is needed. This is Genre, a concept used to capture the impact of the cultural (maybe 'ideological') macro-context of language by exploring the staged structures which cultures institutionalise as ways of achieving set goals. Genre reflects language users' shared (intuitive) knowledge about the nature of texts of 'the same kind'. Generic knowledge enables speakers to refer any single textual exemplar to the class of texts with which that exemplar shares a communicative purpose.

The revised model of translation and translation assessment by the present author (House 1997) encapsulates this theory in the following manner.

**Figure 1**

A Scheme for Analysing and Comparing Original and Translation Texts

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INDIVIDUAL TEXTUAL FUNCTION

REGISTER

FIELD
Subject matter and social action

TENOR
Participant relationship
- author’s provenance and stance
- social role relationship
- social attitude

MODE
- medium (simple/complex)
- participation (simple/complex)

LANGUAGE/TEXT

GENRE
(Generic Purpose)
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Following the analysis of English originals on the basis of this model, an analysis of the German translations (and parallel texts) is undertaken using the same scheme, and a comparison is made (triangulated by ethnographic interviews, institutional context research and analyses of background documents) in order to find out whether the working hypotheses can be confirmed or disconfirmed (for details of the analytical work carried out by the project team see Baumgarten et al. 2001; Böttger 2000; Böttger and Bührig 2000; Böttger and Probst 2001; Probst 2001).

While a categorial scheme such as the one outlined above is clearly beneficial for conducting textual comparisons of any kind, we have in the course of our project work also become aware of its dangers: a categorical scheme can easily lead analysts to prefigure results tempting them to seek confirmation of the theory behind it. Thus, as our analytic work progresses, we have come to realise the advantage of handling the categorial scheme provided in this model in a more flexible, "open" manner integrating new insights and descriptive tools – in particular those provided in functional-pragmatic work (cf. Ehlich 1991; Redder & Rehbein 1999) – while still using the systemic-functional scheme as an overarching frame or "Ordnungsschema".

One of the major difficulties (and challenges) of our analyses has been to separate optional, stylistic choices in the text from both system constraints based on core typological differences between the two languages involved (for German see e.g. Hawkins 1986; König 1990, Doherty 1999) and changes effected through and in the process of translation, such as e.g. explicitation, simplification, "levelling", and demetaphorisation (cf. Blum-Kulka 1986). One of the means of facilitating hypotheses as to whether a particular finding can be explained with reference to stylistic choices, typological differences or translational effects is, of course, a comparison with the results of the analyses of the parallel text corpus, as well as the interviews and background document study. In general, the triangulation built into the design of this project has proved most fruitful for the analyses undertaken.

5. Selected Results and Discussion

Tentative results of the analyses of thirty English and German translational pairs and a few authentic, "monolingual" German texts from the same genres suggest that while cultural filtering seems to be still prevalent in covert translation and parallel text production involving the language pair English and German there are, indeed, some signs that change is under way. In other words, in the bulk of our analytical work our working hypotheses were not confirmed, i.e., widespread borrowing of English lexical items and routines is not (yet) accompanied by changes in the make-up of German texts: Cultural filtering is still operative, i.e., German textual norms are maintained, Anglophone and German norms have not converged. However, analyses of most recent texts point to a shift in the use of those linguistic means which realise the interpersonal functional component, in particular linguistic means of expressing "stance" (Biber et al. 1999), "subjectivity", and "point of view" (Smith this volume?) as well as addressee orientation (Nuyts 2001). However, at the present moment it is too early to draw any major conclusions about these most recent findings (but see Böttger and Probst 2001). I will therefore restrict myself in this paper to discussing some insights that have emerged from the bulk of our analyses so far:

There seem to be systematic differences in the way "interpersonal orientation" or "involvement" is functioning in English and German texts. Thus, while clearly not showing
imported Anglophone reader involvement strategies, the German texts examined can also not easily be categorised as starkly "content-oriented". Rather, German texts display not immediately 'comparable', often more subtle means of realising an interpersonal orientation. Further, not only is an interpersonal focus achieved through different linguistic mechanisms, it also seems to be the case that the very concept "interpersonal orientation" tends to be interpreted differently in the tradition of the German genres examined. This observation can be substantiated by findings such as the following:

(a) There is a preference for a "didactic manner of information presentation" in the German texts, which can be interpreted as representing a kind of "interpersonal focus", with the German texts’ ubiquitous elaboration of information, functioning to ensure understanding on the part of the addressees via the writer’s anticipating comprehension problems, and removing potential points of ambiguity and vagueness in advance. Such a "didactic exegesis", which is especially marked in the German popular science texts, can be interpreted, I would suggest, as having an interpersonal function, and can be related to the ubiquitous explicitation and expansion of information found in most of the German popular science texts. What Clyne (1987) and myself had interpreted as "content-orientedness" of German texts may well need to be re-interpreted, in the sense that the "content-focus" can be seen as serving 'ulterior purposes', i.e., interpersonal ones of addressee involvement. Consider, for example, the following English excerpts taken from the sublines of popular science texts in the journal *Scientific American* and its German translation in *Spektrum der Wissenschaft*:


*Treatment may reduce the chance of contracting HIV infection after a risky encounter.*

*Eine sofortige Behandlung nach Kontakt mit einer Ansteckungsquelle verringert unter Umständen die Gefahr, dass sich das Human-Immunschwäche-Virus im Körper festsetzt. Gewähr gibt es keine, zudem erwachsen eigene Risiken.*


*Groundbreaking work that began more than a quarter of a century ago has led to ongoing insights about brain organization and consciousness.*

*Jahrzehntelange Studien an Patienten mit chirurgisch getrennten Großhirnhälften haben das Verständnis für den funktionellen Aufbau des Gehirns und das Wesen des Bewußtseins vertieft.*
Comparing the English and German excerpts in (1) and (2) above, we can see how, in both cases, the German text producer (the translator) elaborates the informational content given in the English text by answering imaginary reader questions about specific circumstantial elements of extent, location in time and place, manner, cause, conditions, consequences etc. (Treatment when?, Can the treatment guarantee success? Studies involving whom? And so on). In so doing, the text producer wants to ensure understanding by anticipating comprehension problems, removing potential points of 'trouble' (ambiguity, vagueness) in advance. In other words, there is a subtle interpersonal focus in the textual planning, which the writer had undertaken on the basis of his mental interaction with his imaginary readers.

(b) Addressee involvement is further achieved by means of specific German deictic and phoric procedures (e.g. daran, davon, darauf; hierbei, hierdurch, etc.) liberally employed in most of our texts as complex "signposts" directing readers backwards and forwards in the text and skilfully refocussing readers' textual knowledge and/or summarising propositional content for them (see Rehbein 1995). The employment of these procedures, with which writers manage to firmly direct addressees' attention and ensure acquisition and maintenance of relevant cumulative textual knowledge, results in strong local and global cohesion (phrase- and clause-internally as well as across clauses and paragraphs). One of the reasons for the frequent use of these cohesive devices is that they become necessary when paragraph-long English clauses are split up in the German translation, as is the case in the following example (taken from a global player's self-presentation). In the excerpts in (3) we can also see how the two "Verweiswörter" darauf and hierbei in the two German clauses function either to direct readers' attention to ensuing new input or to compress previous input for him as a steppingstone for further information.

(3) Multisyn's Corporate Purpose

Our Purpose in Multisyn is to meet the everyday needs of the people everywhere – to anticipate the aspirations of our consumers and customers and to respond creatively and competitively with branded products and services which raise the quality of life

Multisyn’s Unternehmensphilosophie
Wir als Multisyn konzentrieren unsere Anstrengungen weltweit darauf, den täglichen Bedarf der Menschen zu befriedigen. Hierbei ist es wichtig, die künftigen Wünsche unserer Verbraucher und Kunden zu erkennen, um kreativ mit wettbewerbsfähigen Marken- und Servicekonzepten ihre Lebensqualität zu verbessern

(c) The English texts we examined achieve cohesion-related addressee involvement through different textual means: firstly through what one might call "aesthetic appeal" via the use of such rhetorical devices as figurative language, routines, alliteration, hyperboles and emotive and intensified lexical items, and secondly, through the strategic employment of lexical repetition and grammatical parallelism both micro- and macrostructurally (see e.g. excerpt (3) above and (4) following for the use of some of these devices).

(d) There is a tendency in the English texts towards "Genre Mixing": In the popular science texts, we find mechanisms that readers know from journalism (newspapers,
magazines) and advertising, and the economic texts show traces of religious sermons, advertising and other persuasively oriented genres. The effect of this hybridisation can be seen in the presence of overt "addressee involvement" and 'human interest' achieved most prominently by offering readers possibilities of identification, e.g. by drawing them into the institutional context in which the writer-researcher operates. In the economic texts, these effects are achieved through the use of lexical items with strongly emotive connotations, as can be seen in the following excerpt (4). Notice also that the heading is not translated, the intended effect being an identification with the multinational firm whose headquarters are in an English speaking country.

(4) Multisyn Vision 2000

**Connected Creativity**

I want to be part of a company where I am challenged to:
- Have fun creating new ideas that improve our performance in the market
- Obsessively search for new ideas, by observing, listening and learning from everyone

**Single-minded passion for winning**

I want to be part of a company where I am challenged to:
- Have unrelentingly high expectations of myself and others
- Say "No" to anything that is not clearly aligned with the winning strategy

In excerpt (4) we can see that the type of genre mixing, i.e., borrowing expressive and connatively forceful lexis ("obsessively", "unrelentingly") from journalistic, advertising and religious, missionising genres is not re-constructed in the German text, where "obsessively" turns into "intensive", and "unrelentingly" becomes "hohe" – both German terms being "toned down" or neutralised. Further, we can detect a greater explicitness in the German text in that the company’s agentive role is explicitly mentioned: "Ich will Teil eines Unternehmens sein, das mich herausfordert" vs. "I want to be part of a company where I am challenged", i.e., in the English original responsibility for the "challenging" (which might be open to misinterpretation by company employees) is left vague through the use of the passive and the shifting of the addressees attention to an undefined locative "somewhere in the company". Similarly, the English relational process "have" is translated using the material process "stellen", which, in the context of the utterance "Hohe Erwartungen an
"mich und andere stellen" results in a much more vigorous and demanding illocutionary force than the English use of "have". Findings such as these are very similar to the ones already reported in House (1977), where the analysis of a pair of German-English texts revealed a greater directness in the realisation of requests in the German translations.

In the popular science texts, reader involvement and offers of identification are routinely achieved by using mental process imperatives in the initial paragraph of a text, which function as frames for the entire text, witness excerpt (5), which is taken from the same text exemplar as excerpt (1) above.


Suppose you are a doctor in an emergency room and a patient tells you she was raped two hours earlier. She is afraid she may have been exposed to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS but has heard that there is a "morning-after pill" to prevent HIV infection. Can you in fact do anything to block the virus from replicating and establishing infection?

In der Notfallaufnahme eines Krankenhauses berichtet eine Patientin sie sei vor zwei Stunden vergewaltigt worden und nun in Sorge, dem AIDS-Erreger ausgesetzt zu sein, sie habe aber gehört, es gebe eine "Pille danach", die eine HIV-Infektion verhüte. Kann der Arzt überhaupt irgendetwas tun, was eventuell vorhandene Viren hindern würde, sich zu vermehren und sich dauerhaft im Körper einzunisten?

In the English popular science texts we also find that hearer and speaker deixis as well as alternations of declarative, imperative and interrogative clauses are purposefully used in order to simulate a dialogue between reader and writer. Other "oralizing" means of faking co-presence of writer and reader and their interaction include contact parentheses and gambits of various kinds. It is only after the 'attention getting' first paragraphs that the English popular science texts move onto a more sober exposition of scientific findings. Such a structure – anecdotal, human interest lead-in followed by information transmission – is, of course, a device commonly used in advertising and journalism – both in Anglo-Saxon and German contexts. German popular science texts, however, do not (yet?) show such genre mixing, they are still conventionally less 'popularized'.

Excerpt (6) illustrates such attempts on the part of the English writer to gain the attention of the reader by mood switches. Via the use of imperatives the reader is directly involved, whereas in the German text we find no such attempts of "drawing the reader into the text". Notice also the loss in the German subline of the deliberate ambiguity in the English text’s subline.

Females often prefer to mate with the most flamboyant males. Their choice may be based on a complex interaction between instinct and imitation.

Die Weibchen vieler Tierarten entscheiden sich bevorzugt für besonders prächtige Männchen. Sie folgen dabei nicht allein ihrem Instinkt – auch das Verhalten von Geschlechtsgenossinnnen ist ihnen Vorbild.

Picture a man who has a way with the ladies, and a character not unlike James Bond may spring to mind. He’s clever, classy, fearless and flashy – characteristics that are almost universally appealing to the opposite sex. Throw in the powerful sports car, and you have a nearly irresistible combination.

Ein Mann, auf den die Frauen fliegen – das Klischee dafür ist vielleicht ein Typ à la James Bond, blendendes Aussehen, schlagfertig, sprühend vor Charme und Schneid; dazu ein rasanter Sportwagen, und die Attraktivität erscheint beinahe unwiderstehlich.

In both (5) and (6) we can see that the producers of the English and the German texts differ in the points of view adopted through differential uses of personal deixis. The author of the German text has refrained from enacting a simulation of an interaction. The resulting German text seems to show a dispreference of hybridisation. Similarly, German economic texts (globalised firms' self-presentations and letters to the shareholders) conspicuously lack the English originals' 'missionising', religious undertone, our hypothesis being that for historical reasons such genre mixing is taboo in a German context.

(e) In the English popular science texts, the tendency towards "humanizing" textual material increases the emotional impact the text has on its readers. In the German texts, a more rational appeal seems to prevail. This may be due to differences in cultural traditions generating different types of genres and, with them, different types of generic knowledge and expectation norms (Graefen 1997). And in German popular science texts it is often not the individual researcher in her impressive singularity, but rather her role as disseminator of knowledge which is considered important. Focussing on the writer either as an individual human being or as knowledge transmitter must, however, not be confused with a global difference between an "interpersonal" focus and a "content-focus" in English and German texts respectively.

In summary and to conclude, we have found that the English and German texts in comparable genres are 'made' to function rather differently, to the point that we may well be handling different genres here. Our results may also be seen as leading to a more differentiated view of those global dimensions "interpersonal vs. content orientation" and "explicit vs. implicit presentation of information", with which we started off. Obviously, our preliminary findings must be tested with a larger corpus both of translation texts and authentic "monolingual" German texts. Further, a wider range of language-specific phenomena and their divergent textual functions in different languages must be examined both qualitatively and quantitatively before further conclusions can be drawn.
References:


