Manipulation and Loyalty in Functional Translation

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1   Preliminary remarks

Functional translation theories (among them *Skopostheorie*, cf. Nord 1997) are gaining ground in many parts of the world, especially where translation needs are pressing and equivalence is out of the question for various reasons: different stages of (lexicological, terminological etc.) development with regard to source and target languages, discrepant levels of knowledge and experience in source and target audiences, large gaps between source and target cultures, value systems, perspectives, world views, and so on. Nevertheless, criticisms have been levelled at the theoretical foundations and applicability of functionalist approaches in general and of *Skopostheorie* in particular. Although, as Toury recently pointed out with reference to both *Skopostheorie* and his own target-oriented approach, "target-orientedness as such no longer arouses the same antagonism it used to less than twenty years ago" (1995:25), quite a number of criticisms are still explicitly or implicitly present in debates on translation theory today. Some scholars still maintain the view that equivalence is the only valid yardstick of translation quality and a constitutive characteristic of translation proper, but in view of the variety of translation forms and types that are actually produced and accepted in professional settings, they tend to widen the notion of equivalence to such an extent that it merely refers to *some kind of relationship* between a source and a target text, which then has to be specified as denotative, connotative, aesthetic, pragmatic or other in order to be of use in translation practice or evaluation (cf. Koller [4]1992). But who would be the one to specify what kind of equivalence is required and / or desired in a particular translation process? And what if source and target cultures are separated by such a huge cultural (and/or temporal, geographical) gap that the relationship between the two texts does not allow for any specification of equivalence, however vague it may be?

Is equivalence (of whatever specification of it) a safeguard against a manipulation of texts in the name of functionality? Postcolonial translation studies show that the (theoretical) notion of equivalence has never stopped any translator (or commissioner of translations) from consciously or unconsciously "manipulating" source texts. A corrective is needed for both equivalence-based and function-oriented translation theories. Within the framework of the functionalist approaches, I have suggested the concept of Loyalty. It was first introduced into *Skopostheorie* in 1989 (Nord 1989, cf. Nord 1997:123ff.) in order to account for the culture-specificity of translation concepts, setting an ethical limitation to the otherwise unlimited range of possible *skopoi* for the translation of one particular source text. It was argued that the translator, in their role as mediator between two cultures, has a special responsiblity with regard to their partners, i.e. the source-text author, the client or commissioner of the translation, and the target-text receivers, precisely in those cases where there are discrepant views as to what a "good" translation is or should be. As an inter*personal* relationship, loyalty was supposed to replace the traditional inter*textual* relationship of "faithfulness" or "fidelity", concepts that usually refer to a linguistic or stylistic similarity between the source and the target *texts*, regardless of the communicative intentions and/or expectations involved.

After briefly characterizing both the functional approach to translation and the principle of loyalty, I would like to show in the following paper that loyalty can be a corrective not only in function-oriented but also in equivalence-based translation processes, illustrating this point by means of four examples, two of them taken from the area of Bible translation.

2   Basic principles of functional translation

The main hypotheses of a functional approach to translation (as, for example, *Skopostheorie*, cf. Vermeer 1978, 1989) may be briefly resumed in the following basic principles:

- The translation purpose determines the choice of translation method and strategy. This means that – as experience shows – there is not *the* one and only method or strategy for one particular source text, and any decision between two or more available solutions to a translation problem must be guided by some kind of intersubjective criterion or set of criteria (= strategy). In our case, this criterion is the communicative function or functions for which the target text is needed (= functionality principle).
- The commissioner or client who needs a translation usually defines the translation purpose in the translation brief. If the translation brief is not sufficiently explicit (like: "Could you please translate this text until Wednesday!"), the translator has to find out what kind of purposes the client has in mind – either relying on previous experiences in similar situations, or interpreting any clues that might be indicating the intended purpose, or asking the client for more information about their intended purpose(s).
- A translation that achieves the intended purpose may be called functional. Functionality means that a text (in this case: a translation) "works" for its receivers the way the sender wants it to work in a particular communicative situation. If the purpose is information, the text should offer this information in a form comprehensible to the audience; if the purpose is to amuse, then the text should actually be amusing for its readers. Therefore, the text producer (and the translator as a text producer, too) has to evaluate the audience's capacities of comprehension and cooperation and anticipate the possible effects which certain forms of expression may have on the readership.
- Functionality is not an inherent quality of a text. It is a quality attributed to the text by the receiver in the moment of reception. It is the receiver who decides whether (and how) a text "functions" (for them, in a specific situation). If, as we know, one and the same receiver at different moments of her life may react in different ways to the "same" text (e.g., Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*), it is most improbable that different readers at different moments should react to the same text in the same way, let alone readers belonging to different cultural environments.
- But if this is true, how can we be sure that a text achieves the function we want it to achieve? We can't. But usually we rely on the audience being willing to cooperate in a given situation. Otherwise communication would be impossible. Therefore, any text producer consciously or unconsciously uses some kind of verbal and/or non-verbal "function markers" indicating the intended communicative function(s), e.g., printing the text in tiny letters on a slip of paper that comes with a box of pills, indicating a patient package insert; a title like *instructions for use*; a particular text format or layout like in a newspaper heading; certain sentence structures, like imperatives in a recipe; a particular register of style like in an editorial; certain forms of addressing the audience in a students'

manual, etc. If the receivers recognize the function markers, they may accept the text as serving precisely this function. But the markers can only be interpreted correctly by a receiver who is familiar with the "marker code" they belong to.

- One of the most important text-producing strategies is to find the appropriate balance between new and known information: If a text offers too much new information it will be incomprehensible for the readers, while if it contains too little new information the audience will not find it worth reading.
- Especially in the case of texts translated from a source culture that is very distant in time and/or space from the target-cultural environment, the function (or hierarchy of functions) intended for, and/or achieved by, the target text may be different from that or those intended for, and/or achieved by, the source text.

3   Loyalty as a Corrective in Functional Translation

Looking at the basic principles presented in the previous section we may wonder why there is no mention of criteria like "faithfulness" or "fidelity", which have been almost sacrosanct values in any discourse on translation for the past two thousand years. This is the reason why some critics reproach functionalism for producing "mercenary experts, able to fight under the flag of any pupose able to pay them" (Pym 1996:338). Or others take the view that a translator who takes into account the needs and expectations of their target audience must necessarily lose sight of "the" source text.

The latter criticism can be answered on the grounds of the concept of *text* used in functional translation theory. According to what we said about functional markers and their culture-specificity, the form in which the source text lies before the translator is a product of the many variables of the situation (time, place, medium, addressees) in which it originated, and the way this form is interpreted and understood by the translator or any other receiver is guided by the variables of the new reception situation.

The first criticism refers to an ethical aspect related to the status of the source text. While the broader text-linguistic equivalence approach stretches the idea of a translation's "double linkage" to both the source and target sides so far as to blur the borderline between translations and non-translations, narrower linguistic approaches still start from the autonomy or authority of a source text that must not be touched in the translation process. In *Skopostheorie*, however, the source text, or more precisely, its linguistic and stylistic features, is no longer regarded as the one and only yardstick for a translation. Does this mean that the translator is entitled to do just "anything" with the source text?

Indeed, the first basic principle of functionalism could be paraphrased as "the translation purpose justifies the translation procedures", and this could easily be interpreted as "the end justifies the means". Then there would be no restriction to the range of possible ends, the source text could be manipulated as clients (or translators) see fit. In a general theory, this might be acceptable enough, since one could always argue that general theories do not have to be directly applicable. Yet translation practice does not take place in the void. It takes place in specific situations set in specific cultures, so any application of the general theory, either to practice or to training, has to take account of the specific cultural conditions under which a text is translated.

At different times and in different parts of the world people have had and still have different concepts of the relationship that should hold between an original and the text that is called its translation. According to the prevailing concept of translation,

readers might expect, for example, that the target text gives exactly the author's opinion; other cultures might want it to be a faithful reproduction of the formal source-text features; still others could praise archaizing translations or ones that are not at all faithful reproductions but comprehensible, readable texts. Taking account of all these different expectations, which may vary according to the text type in question or depend on the self-esteem of the receiving culture with regard to the source culture, the translator acts as a responsible mediator in the cooperation developing between the client, the target audience and the source-text author. This does not mean that translators always have to do what the others expect – this may even be impossible if the three parties expect different translational behaviours. It just means that the translator has to anticipate any misunderstanding or communicative conflict that may occur due to different translational concepts and find a way to avoid them.

This responsibility translators have toward their partners is what I call "loyalty". Loyalty is not the old faithfulness or fidelity in new clothes, because faithfulness and fidelity usually refer to an intertextual relationship holding between the source and the target *texts* as linguistic entities. However, loyalty is an interpersonal category referring to a social relationship between *people*.

In a general model, loyalty would be an empty slot that is filled, in a particular translation task, by the demands of the specific translation concepts of the cultures in question, especially when the source-text author and the target-text audience hold discrepant views of what a translator should or should not do. It is the translator's task to mediate between the two cultures, and mediation cannot mean to impose the concept of one culture on members of another.

In introducing the loyalty principle into the functionalist model, I would also hope to lay the foundations for a trustful relationship between the source-text author and the translator. If the author can be sure that the translator will respect their communicative interests or intentions, she or he may even consent to any changes or adaptations needed to make the translation work in the target culture. And this confidence would again strengthen the translator's social prestige as a responsible and trustworthy partner.

The loyalty principle thus adds two important qualities to the functional approach. Since it obliges the translator to take account of the difference between culture-specific concepts of translation prevailing in the two cultures involved in the translation process, it turns *Skopostheorie* into an anti-universalist model, and since it induces the translator to respect the sender's individual communicative intentions, as far as they can be elicited, it reduces the prescriptiveness of "radical" functionalism.

The first basic principle of functional translation theory mentioned above should therefore be complemented by the following limitation:

- The acceptability of translation purposes is limited by the translator's responsibility with regard to their partners in the cooperative activity of translation (= loyalty principle). Loyalty may oblige the translator to lay open their translation purposes and justify their translational decisions.

As the only one in the communicative "game" of translation who (by definition) knows both the source and the target cultures, the translator holds a powerful role. They could easily deceive their partners without anybody noticing – sometimes even just by "faithfully" translating "what the source *text* says" (see section 7). Seen in this way, loyalty may be a corrective in the powerplay between client, author, target receivers, and the translator. In the following sections, I will discuss a few examples which may illustrate this point.

4   Ernesto Cardenal's views on post-revolutionary Cuba

In his book *En Cuba*, written after a first visit to Cuba following the Revolution in 1959, the Nicaraguan priest Ernesto Cardenal presents a subjective, politically biased view of the Cuban society. He is enthusiastic about the changes brought about by Fidel Castro's government. At no moment does he pretend to be objective, and the reader cannot fail to be impressed, even though they may not share Cardenal's views. The German translation published in 1972 (*In Kuba. Bericht einer Reise*) nevertheless gives the impression of a moderate, rather objective report of the author's journey, with the reader constantly being reminded that all that glitters is not gold.

Just one short example may illustrate the translation strategy used by the translator:

> *Example 1*: The original is dedicated "al pueblo cubano y a Fidel", i.e. to the Cuban people and to Fidel Castro. The dedication is omitted in the translation, although it would have been a strong marker of the expressive-emotive function intended by the author.

From what they read in the translation, the German audience is most likely to believe the author has adopted a critical attitude toward Castro's regime, without realizing that this conclusion is not in line with the intention of the author himself. At the same time, the author probably expects the translation to reproduce his personal viewpoints, and he is not in a position to judge whether it actually conforms to his expectation. Both the author and the target audience are deceived, although the translation may have been quite functional from the publisher's standpoint, who in the early 1970s may not have dared to confront readers in Western Germany with a "pro-Communist" author. The translator should have argued this point with the publisher or, if necessary, she even might have turned down the commission, refusing to manipulate the author's communicative intentions in this way.

5   Emotionality

Sometimes, loyalty may induce the translator to do something the source-text author would probably not allow if asked for permission. In a book on "Philosophies of Education" (Fullat 1979), the Spanish author discusses several philosophers' theories and views on education, which he sums up by saying that "their positivism makes him vomit" (*es para vomitar*), which even in a more "emotional" culture like the Spanish is a rather harsh way of expressing one's criticism. When the book was translated into German (Fullat 1982), the translators had to decide between faithfulness to the text and loyalty to the author. They knew that if they had asked the author for permission to use a somewhat less crude expression he most probably would have insisted on a faithful, i.e. literal, translation because that was what he wanted to say. But such an expression, which of course exists in German, would have seriously geopardized the book's acceptability in German academia. Somebody using this kind of emotionality in a manual for university students would simply not be regarded as a serious scholar in their field. In the Spanish context, it was the author himself who risked his credibility – and maybe as a well-known scholar he thought he could take the risk. In the German context, however, the responsibility for the author's academic standing rested with the translators. In their role as experts in their profession, they could not leave the decision to the author, who was an expert in educational philosophy, but not in translation, let alone in the German culture. Therefore, they decided to adjust the form of the criticism to target-culture standards, translating it by *ist schwer zu ertragen* ("is hard to bear") – which according to the

standards of German academic writing comes very close to the limits of acceptability and still gives the reader an idea of the emotional load in the author's criticism.

6   Political Correctness

Modern translations of ancient texts may have to take norms or conventions of "political correctness" into account that prevail in the target culture at the moment of translation. But here, too, loyalty may lead to different solutions according to the intended function of both source and/or target texts. This can be shown using two examples from recent translations of New Testament texts into English and German.

> *Example 2: Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 6,18, emphasis added)*
> ➢ Flee *fornication*. Every sin that *a man* doeth is without the body but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. (KJV s.a.).
> ➢ Flee from *sexual immorality*. All other sins *a man* commits are outside his body, but he who *sins sexually* sins against his own body. (NIV 1984)
> ➢ Avoid *immorality*. Any other sin *a man* commits does not affect his body; but the man who is guilty of *sexual immorality* sins against his own body. (TEV 1992)

When Paul appeals to his addressees to *flee fornication* English readers will understand something different from what he intended to say, although the dictionary indeed translates the Greek word *porneia* by "fornication". The *Dictionary of Contemporary English* (DCE 1978) defines *fornication* as "sexual relations outside marriage". Modern English readers of the King James Version may therefore find Paul's attitude rather oldfashioned and rigid, whereas readers of *Today's English Version* or the *New International Version*, due to the politically correct substitution of *fornication* by *sexual immorality* or just *immorality* might think that Paul is being rather pathetic. We need not read the Bible in order to know that we should refrain from doing immoral things, whether sexual or not. In the cited passage, Paul was very clearly referring to prostitution (one of the many different meanings of *porneia*, apart from homosexuality, incest, adultery and others), and the translation by "immorality" or "sexual immorality" leaves the interpretation to the readers, who cannot but consider these moral categories from their own (modern) perspective.

Luther (rev. 1984) translates *porneia* by "Hurerei" (= *prostitution*), whereas contemporary German translations use the dictionary equivalent "Unzucht". This word is marked as obsolete in the *Dictionary of the German Language* (Duden 1993). In modern German, it is used as a juridical term only, referring to sexual behaviour sanctioned by criminal law (e.g., sodomy). This translation might induce modern German readers to rest assured – "Unzucht" is something *they* do not practice anyway. So contrary to Paul's intention to make people refrain from their (bad) habits, the translation may even cause the opposite reaction.

The other interesting aspect of the passage in question is the reference to "a man" committing fornication or (sexual) immorality, which we find in all English translations, even the most recent ones. Here, "political correctness" has not brought about any change. The German translations, from Luther until the present day, translate "der Mensch" (= *humans*), thus including both men and women.

7   Vagueness

The following example illustrates that in order to be loyal toward both the source-text author and the target audience, a translator may even have to stick to a particular interpretation where the source text seems to be open or vague in meaning.

Example 3: The Gospel of John (Jn 1,1-5, emphasis added)

➢ [1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him: and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.] 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (KJV s.a.)

➢ 5Und das Licht scheint in der Finsternis, und die Finsternis hat's nicht ergriffen. (LUT 1984)

➢ A luz resplandece nas trevas mas as trevas não a compreenderam. (BSB 1982)

➢ ...et la lumière dans les ténèbres luit, et le ténèbres ne l'ont point saisie. (NTF 1922)

The King James Authorized Version (KJV), Luther (LUT 1984), Alfred Loisy's French translation (NTF 1922), and one of the two analysed Brazilian versions (BSB 1982) offer a literal translation of the Greek, which allows two interpretations. The first takes darkness and light as metaphors for "the world" and "Jesus", respectively. In this case, the generic verb *comprehend* is interpreted as "understand" or "accept", like in the *New International Version* (NIV 1984), the German *Gute Nachricht Bibel* (GBN 1997), the Spanish version by Nácar/Colunga (SBN 1975), and the Italian *Bibbia di Gerusalemme* (BDG 1974). This interpretation is supported by verse 10-11, where the author refers to Jesus not having been recognized by his people.

➢ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (NIV 1984)

➢ Das Licht strahlt in der Dunkelheit, aber die Dunkelheit hat sich ihm verschlossen. (GNB 1997)

➢ La luz luce en las tinieblas, pero las tinieblas no la acogieron. (SBN 1975).

➢ ...la luce splende nelle tenebre, ma le tenebre non l'hanno accolta. (BDG 1974)

The second interpretation starts by taking *darkness* and *light* literally, thus creating an image that allows the audience to draw on everyday experience before realizing the metaphorical quality of the passage. It comes to the conclusion that the light was so strong that darkness could not do anything against it, like in the old Spanish translation by Casiodoro de Reina (CDR 1960), in a modern Spanish translation by Lamadrid et al. (SBE 1964), the Brazilian translation by Antônio Pereira de Figueiredo (BSB s.a.), and DNT 1999.

➢ La luz en las tinieblas resplandece, y las tinieblas no prevalecieron contra ella. (CDR 1960)

➢ La luz luce en las tinieblas y las tinieblas no la sofocaron. (SBE 1964)

➢ A luz resplandece nas trevas, e as trevas não prevaleceram contra ela. (BSA s.a.)

➢ Das Licht macht die Finsternis hell, und die Finsternis hat das Licht nicht verschluckt. (DNT 1999)

The first four versions of the text (KJV, LUT, BSB and NTF) might be regarded as the most faithful ones, since the generic verb leaves the interpretation to the readers. But here we have to think of the cultural gap between the source and the target situations. Today, readers would probably be inclined to adopt the pessimistic interpretation (like the translators of NIV, BDG, GNB, and SBN) because it seems so much more logical from a 21st century point of view, when we realize that, after more than 2000 years, the light is far from having won the battle against darkness. Many readers might not even think of interpreting the text in a different way, nor are they aware of the culture-specificity of their own perspective.

Similarly, the source-text audience may have had their own inclination toward one of the two interpretations, but we cannot but speculate which was the one that seemed more logical to them. Therefore, we should start to analyse the passage taking the author's perspective. Why would somebody express himself ambiguously in such an important statement about what he thought was Jesus' role? Addressing an audience familiar with Genesis 1 he could rely on their capacity to see the intertextuality, which supports the literal interpretation of the relationship between the light and darkness (where, by the way, the light overcame the darkness). Seen from this point of view, it seems much more probable that the Evangelist expected his audience to take the positive interpretation for granted. Moreover, would you expect somebody who wants to attract other people to his cause to start by telling them that it is not worth the effort in the first place?

Therefore, there are at least two good arguments in favour of the positive interpretation, which is also supported by the observation that biblical texts generally seem less abstract or generalizing in their expressions than what we are accustomed to. Biblical authors show a strong tendency towards down-to-earth, concrete ways of expression, based on everyday experience (such as a little oil lamp in the darkness of the night). This was the reason why the translators of DNT 1999 chose the verb *verschlucken* ("to swallow") in order to describe what the darkness did not do with the light.

As we can see from the analysed translations, the score is even for each of the three strategies: vagueness, pessimism and optimism. Any translator has to decide for themselves, and loyalty may be a better guideline to find out what the author's intention may have been than faithfulness.

8   Conclusion

In a translation task, the translator may be the only person capable of evaluating the impact of certain forms of expression in either of the two cultures involved, anticipating the possible effects of a particular formulation on the target audience. This gives them a tremendous amount of power. Some people may think that a faithful translation just of the text and nothing but the text can prevent an abuse of this power – the examples discussed above show, however, that the opposite may be the case. The translator's responsibility as an expert in both the cultures involved *and* in translation may precisely require a translation which is not faithful to the wording of the text but expresses the author's intention in a form suitable for, and acceptable in, the target situation for which the translation is intended. It is an illusion to think that the apparent vagueness of an expression in the source text (which for the original audience with their specific world view may not even have been so vague after all!) can be "preserved" over a temporal and cultural gap of almost 2000 years just by rendering it by an equally "vague" expression in the target language (which the target audience may then tend to interpret in a very specific way on the grounds of their culture-specific perspective).

Of course, loyalty does not prevent a translator from being mistaken, from taking the "wrong" decision. But a careful deliberation of the possible consequences of their actions, which takes into account the interests and expectations of *all* the other *persons* involved, may lead translators to a more responsible attitude toward their role as cultural mediators. And this behaviour may, in turn, contribute to a better social image of the profession.

9   References

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