

## **Introduction**

### **Looking for meaning: Methodological issues in translation studies**

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If translation is the transfer of a message, it is also the travel of one meaning or set of meanings from one point in space or time to another. Professional translators and interpreters are fulltime practitioners of retrieving meanings from texts and discourses and producing meanings in their own texts and discourses; their readers and listeners will in their own turn construe their own meanings. Translation studies (TS) relies so heavily on a concept of meaning, that one may claim that there is no TS without any reference to meanings. However, different approaches in TS refer to different types of meaning: some researchers are looking for lexical patterns in source texts and their translations (Nilsson 2002), while other scholars concentrate on how the text utterances function within their immediate contexts (Nord 1997). Or while some studies are investigations of the impact of the text as a whole on its audience or even society (Venuti 1998), others refer to philosophy of language as a means to look at meaning in translation (Malmkjær 1993).

Some researchers explicitly talk about meaning as a cognitive concept and say, for instance, that translators and interpreters construct or assemble meaning (Dancette 1997; Setton 1999). Others regard it as a textual characteristic. In the latter view, texts themselves hold meanings, so translations can be compared in terms of meanings with each other, with source texts or with a comparable corpus. If a source text has “The company became the major manufacturer of their fine ladies’ gloves” and the back-translation of a translation is [“The company became the major supplier of their fine ladies’ gloves”], it is possible to claim that the source text and the translation differ slightly from one another semantically. Implicitly, however, such a view, too, usually regards meaning as coming into its own when it is related to a person: it could be a meaning construed by the translator whether or not intended by the source text writer or the meaning construed by the reader of either the source or target text whether or not intended by the writer or translator respectively..

While meaning analyses in TS may not procure the total meaning of a text on their own, they do highlight different aspects of that meaning in source texts and target texts. Consequently, the purpose of this volume *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series (7/2008)*, *Looking for meaning: methodological issues in translation studies*, is not to provide “a good theory of meaning”, which is still missing both in linguistics and

information technology (CASK- 2008), but to discuss the specific methods translation scholars use to discuss meaning aspects: how do they study meaning systematically when they aim to bring forward findings from which translation principles can be generalized? Which are their models, paradigms and theories?

The present volume is therefore unique in its approach: it presents explicit reflections on methodologies employed to discuss the meanings of texts. Its contributors have been asked to focus on methods explicitly and to elaborate on the notions and the paradigms which they have been taken from. Its topic, meaning in translation studies, has, of course, been the object of investigation in previous work in TS. Most obviously, meaning and its role in translation has been dealt with in the *Translation and Meaning* series, edited by Marcel Thelen and Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, who have compiled contributions from the International Maastricht-Lodz Duo Colloquium on the topic every five years since 1990.<sup>1</sup> Another related volume is Dam et al.'s contribution to the *Text, Translation, Computational Processing series on Knowledge Systems and Translation* (2005). That volume includes Snell-Hornby's scenes-and-frames semantic study, the semantic networks modelling by Dam et al., Young-Jin's cultural constellation method, Setton's relevance-theoretic approach and Sergo and Thome's mental space analysis. Only the last type of approach is represented in the present volume in Hernandez's contribution, too; the other approaches are not, but this volume presents other, different methods.

While discussing and illustrating their approaches, contributors are specific about the units of meaning from which their analyses start; the analytical methods and conceptual tools available to determine the multiplicity of meaning of a word, phrase, utterance, paragraph or text; the meaning framework or paradigm within which they work; and its general principles and assumptions. Some contributors distinguish between different types of meanings, others use specific descriptive tools with which they refer to a particular meaning of a word, phrase, utterance, paragraph or text. And a few contributors quantify their findings on meanings.

Although the set of models, paradigms, methods and theories in this volume is quite substantial, it is not exhaustive, and readers who would like to get acquainted with more meaning paradigms are referred to the books mentioned above. Little attention has also been paid to the answer to the question whether the method adopted was influenced by the languages, the text types or the objects of investigation under consideration. This is a question for further research and the present volume may well be fruitful for it does display a fair amount of variability. The present contributors illustrate their methods by investigating source text and target passages in at least eight different languages: Catalan (Dols & Mansell), Dutch (Macken & Lefever, Kerremans et al.), English (Cavalheiro, Conway, Dols & Mansell, García, Goethals, Goldfajn, Hernández, House, Kerremans et al., Macken & Lefever, Osimo, Rosa), Portuguese (Cavalheiro, Hernández,

Rosa), French (Conway, Goethals, Goldfajn), German (House), Modern and Biblical Hebrew (Goldfajn, Osimo) and Spanish (García, Goethals). Although the call for papers was distributed worldwide, the languages referred to clearly reveal that the contributors are all Westerners. I did receive a few proposals in which Eastern and African texts were discussed, but, unfortunately, it was not possible to elaborate them in such a way that they fitted into the present volume within the time available.

With regard to text type, García's, Macken & Lefever's and Zethsen's approaches are implicitly applicable to any text type, while the text types and registers investigated in the other contributions display a wide variety: child literature (Goldfajn, House), poetry (Dols & Mansell), short stories (Hernández), novels (House, Rosa), audiovisual novels (Cavalheiro), news broadcasts (Conway), essays (Goethals), autobiographies (House), Hebrew Bible (Goldfajn, Osimo) and specialized texts (Kerremans et al.).

And as to the range of language items or features discussed in this volume, Osimo is the only one who covers almost all language features in his article. The other contributors focus on one or more aspects: dialect (Cavalheiro), plurilingualism (Hernández), tenor or narrator profile (Rosa), nouns and verbs (García), tense (Goldfajn), terminology (Kerremans et al.), concept (Conway), semantic prosody (Zethsen), objective grounding (Goethals), ambiguity (Macken & Lefever), politeness, allusion, explicitation, omission, allusion, dialect and style (House) and verse, grammar, content and identity (Dols & Mansell).

The variables of method selection above may not have been the focus of attention, the methods themselves, however, were given ample reflection. And although this issue did not endeavour to bring new methods or new results to the field, its primary aim being to juxtapose various considerations on methods, it does turn out to contain findings and insights in TS that have not yet been presented elsewhere. Most notably, there is Rosa's extensive quantitative study which compares Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* with eight European Portuguese translations for juvenile and adult readerships and finds 'levelling-out' and explicitation as two tendencies. Cavalheiro's case study reveals that a public service channel, as well as VHS and internet subtitles adopt a strategy of centralization (or standardization) in terms of register and regional and sociocultural variety, while the subtitles in a private television channel reveal a strategy of decentralization. Goldfajn observes that the translation of temporal meanings involves not only specific temporal interpretations but also subtler conceptions of subjectivity and literary and linguistic conventions in translation. Hernández argues that monolinguality representing postcolonial plurilingual passages imposes semantic restrictions that may result in a different, domesticated representation of the recreated reality. Employing a circuit model of culture, Conway describes the dynamic, historically conditioned relationships between the 'essentially contested concepts' of 'distinct society' and 'société distincte'. García introduces 'semic

verbalisation' as a systematic translation procedure so as to first lexicalise and then translate a word's sense components. Goethals produces an encounter between semiotically motivated linguistic description and narratologically motivated translation research questions and introduces the notions of "empathy" and "anxiety" in the interpretation of the translator's decisions. Dols and Mansell provide a cognitive basis to Toury's two translation laws and suggest there are no others. And House advocates a systematic functional approach to translation because it allows a view of language as a meaning-making tool in micro-situational and macro-sociocultural contexts: translation can then be seen as re-contextualisation and a 'third space' phenomenon, with the exception of translations from English, which may gradually become a first space phenomenon.

The originality in the remaining articles lies in the explicitness with which they describe the paths taken to achieve insight into the meaning of their object of study. This was also the main purpose of this issue's contributors: to identify and describe the methods that they adopt to discuss meaning. All contributors present different paradigms from different domains of knowledge. Rosa's are based on systemic functional grammar, critical linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. Her method to identify narratorial voice in fiction applies an eclectic set of notions from narratology, stylistics and appraisal theory. She also includes a time dimension in her research and compares meanings retrieved from older texts with those from more recent texts. Cavalheiro's analysis of subtitles goes back to polysystem theory and finds instances of Toury's standardization law and Rosa's decentralizing pragmatic strategies. In Conway's study, a hermeneutic circuit model of culture is proposed, containing relevant items for the description of politically loaded concepts. Dols & Mansell apply relevance theory and optimality theory to their analysis of verse translation, which they regard as a decision-making process that is governed by a hierarchy of universal yet violable constraints. García presents his own mentalistic procedure of semic verbalization to retrieve the denotation of language items; it draws upon componential analysis and philosophy of language besides linguistics and translation studies. Goethals combines cognitive grammar with narratology, while Goldfajn applies various linguistic analyses to the tense forms in her examples. In Hernández's study, Fauconnier's concept of mental space and Johnson-Laird's theory of mental models allow the description of the different cultures involved in translation. House, too, employs the term of 'space', however, she does so in a completely different concept, that is, Bhabha's 'third space'. In TS, she argues, it can be identified by means of Halliday's functional linguistics and her own recontextualization theory. Kerremans et al. argue in favour of termontography as a methodology to develop ontological resources that will aid meaning retrieval in specialized texts. They pay special attention to the categorisation framework, an instrument used in termontography for structuring terminological information and implemented in the didactic software tool CatTerm.

Macken and Lefever show how state-of-the-art statistical machine translation systems capture local contextual dependencies by using phrases instead of words as units of translation and how more complex ambiguity problems requiring a broader text scope or even domain information can be solved by integrating a word sense disambiguation module in the machine translation environment to recover meanings of potentially ambiguous words. Relying on Peirce's view of the meaning of signs, Osimo presents a model of meaning-based translation shifts that is based both on van Leuven-Zwart's model and Torop's chronotopic model. Finally, Zethsen argues for the application of corpus-based cognitive semantics as represented by Sinclair, Louw and Stubbs as a tool for translation studies research into evaluative aspects of meaning in source texts and target texts.

While this volume focuses on methods rather than goals, one cannot exist without the other. Therefore, although implicit, the final question that inspired me to compile this volume was whether methods really produce 'meaning' of source texts and target texts. I would like to leave it to readers' judgements to determine to which extent methods are successful at identifying the types of meaning they are intended for. Using the notions that I employed in my book *Translating Untranslatability, English-Dutch / Dutch-English* (2008), I can conclude that the volume discusses both predicational meanings and messenger-related meanings, whether intentional or unintentional: predicates and arguments, coherence, embedding, messengers' assessments of their audience and of states of affairs, their attitude towards the propositions they have uttered and even information about the messengers themselves.

Let me, therefore, summarize with an image. If translation studies had its own archive museum, this volume would be found in the wing of self-portraits: translation scholars discussing their own positions when retrieving all sorts of meanings from sounds/letters, morphemes, words, utterances and acts of communication in source texts and target texts. Against the wall, visitors would see a well-lit, small-sized, multi-coloured collage of different types of fragmentary maps, all showing routes to meanings.

This collage will be the first step of a larger project. Some contributors to the volume will meet at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Pragmatics Conference 'Diversity, context and structure' in Melbourne next summer. As a panel on 'Contextual analyses in translation studies', we will continue our discussion of meaning retrieval methods in TS, cross our own boundaries and explore the different points of view that are taken to study our common object of study, that is, translation. We hope that we will be given the opportunity to discuss and compare our own maps with those of other scholars, who studied different types of texts in different types of translation situations. Intriguing questions and issues such as the following will be discussed: what is the working definition for the loaded concept of 'meaning' that researchers start from? what exactly is it that one method contributes to TS better than the other? does the text type or mode of the

languages involved have an impact on the method? do the languages involved in the translation have an impact on the method? does the directionality of a language pair involved in the translation have an impact on the method?

The present volume will be our starting point: a collage to which we can add more routes to meanings in translation studies. And if we look carefully, surely, we will find that some routes are leading to similar goals sometimes criss-crossing one another. The next step will then be to identify the more effective routes.

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<sup>1</sup> Readers will find a discussion of *Translation and Meaning, Part 7. Proceedings of the Maastricht Session of the 4th International Maastricht- Łódź Duo Colloquium on "Translation and "Meaning", Held in Maastricht, The Netherlands, 18-21 May 2005* by Leona Van Vaerenbergh in the review section of this volume.