

## Oxford Handbooks Online

### The Translator as Cross-Cultural Mediator

Susan Bassnett

The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies

*Edited by Kirsten Malmkjær and Kevin Windle*

Print Publication Date: Mar 2011

Subject: Linguistics, Translation and Interpretation, Sociolinguistics

Online Publication Date: Sep  
2012

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199239306.013.0008

### Abstract and Keywords

Interest in translation has grown owing to global changes. Translation, nowadays, signifies interchange between cultures. Translation is a communicative activity that involves the transfer of information across linguistic boundaries. Translation has a sociocultural context. Alongside the advent of the term 'cultural mediation', the term 'cultural translation' has also come into being, generally used to refer to transactions that do not explicitly involve linguistic exchange. The development of translation studies as an independent field has not been a linear process, and today there are a number of approaches to the study of translation and the training of translators. The two most significant lines of development have been descriptive translation studies and Skopos theory respectively. The functional approach of Skopos theorists has been useful, and there are huge developments in machine translation, but the task of mediation between cultures, involving negotiating understanding between global and local systems, still requires human agency.

Keywords: interchange, linguistic boundaries, cultural translation, descriptive translator studies, Skopos theory, mediation

---

### 7.1 Introduction

Since the start of the twenty-first century, interest in translation has grown in an unprecedented way. This has been, in part, due to global changes: mass migration, the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent 'war against terror', conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the threat of global warming, along with increased anxiety about the interlocking economic systems of nation-states, and in part also due to the expansion of global communication systems. Not only has translation come more into prominence as an instrument—we need translators in order to gain access to languages that we do not know—but the terminology of translation has also come to be used metaphorically, to indicate a shift in ways of thinking about interchange between cultures. Some writers have gone so far as to suggest that translation is a common human condition in the new millennium, with people 'translated' from one culture to another and, through their memories, 'translating' their lives, even as they literally translate between a language learned in childhood and another acquired along the journey through life. It is therefore not surprising that a new field of research, translation studies, that first came into being in the late 1970s, should have flourished around the world in the last decade, with particular (p. 95) emphasis being placed on examining the role of the translator not only as a bilingual interpreter but also as a figure whose role is to mediate between cultures.

### 7.2 Defining translation

The task of the translator is to render a text written in one language into another, hence making available material that would otherwise be inaccessible. Translation is therefore a communicative activity that involves the transfer of information across linguistic boundaries. Simple assumptions about translation are based on the notion that whatever is written in the source language (SL) can be transferred into the target language (TL). The development

of the bilingual dictionary was based on this premise.

Theorists of translation, however, have long acknowledged the difficulty of achieving total equivalence between languages and ensuring that what has meaning in one context will have the same meaning in another. From the earliest attempts to formulate theories of translation, distinctions have been made between a translation that closely follows the source text and a translation that diverges. St Jerome acknowledged a debt to Cicero in his Letter to Pammachius, written some time between 405 and 410 AD in distinguishing between word-for-word translation and the alternative, sense-for-sense translation. A literal translation, he argued, 'obscures the sense in the same way as the thriving weeds smother the seeds. [...] Let others stick to syllables, or even to letters, you should try to grasp the sense!' (Lefevere 1992: 48–9). The problems of how a translator might find ways of grasping the sense while diverging from the words themselves are perennial ones for a translator.

This binary distinction has continued to be a focus of attention for translators and translation theorists for centuries. In the latter half of the twentieth century, which saw the advent of the interdisciplinary field known as translation studies, scholars, including J. C. Catford, Anton Popovic, Jiří Levý, and many others, began wrestling with the problem of how adequately to define what constituted equivalence in translation; they also explored the complex question of untranslatability, since not all linguistic items have their counterparts in other languages by any means. The problem of defining equivalence remains central to the field, but the emphasis has shifted away from endeavouring to see equivalence in terms of sameness between languages, and more towards exploring ideas of equivalent effect. Some scholars, such as Eugene Nida, whose starting point was Bible translation and anthropology, have strongly emphasized the importance of context for a translator. As Nida points out, a language cannot be understood 'outside the total (p. 96) framework of the culture, of which the language in question is an integral part' (1964a: 223). The translator is therefore engaged not only with words, but with the context in which those words appear, and any equivalence will have to take into account the two different contexts, that of the source and that of the target. Nida's book *Customs and Cultures* (1964a) begins with the arresting story of Congolese elders rejecting a proposal made by missionaries that women should wear clothing that covered their breasts, on the grounds that they did not want their wives to dress like prostitutes. He goes on to explain that in that part of the Congo, fully dressed women were often prostitutes who had the money to spend on Western clothes; the nakedness perceived by missionaries as undesirable was seen by locals as more modest than being fully clothed. Through this, and many similar examples, Nida argues for the importance of contextual understanding and the need for constant reconsideration of one's own embedded cultural presuppositions. Without this kind of contextual understanding, which necessarily involves rethinking one's own position and mediating between the potential gaps created by fundamental cultural differences, adequate translation will not take place.

In his seminal essay 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' (1959), Roman Jakobson distinguished between three types of translation, which he defined as intralingual, or rewording within the same language, interlingual, or what he saw as translation proper, and intersemiotic translation or transmutation. This essay has been much discussed, and still remains important because it sets out so succinctly different aspects of the same activity. What is involved in this, and in all the attempts to distinguish types of translation, is a need to clarify the extent to which a translator can diverge from the source while still claiming to be producing a translation. In short, the debate revolves around the degree of freedom permitted to a translator when recreating a text in another language. Jakobson's 'transmutation' implies a greater degree of divergence from a source than his 'interlingual' translation does, and in this respect is not so different from St Jerome's notion of sense-for-sense translation.

### 7.3 Translation in context

The debate has generated a great deal of discussion around the question of what constitutes faithfulness to a source. Often, this debate has been couched in figurative language. Hence, in the seventeenth century, an age when theories of language and of translation were expanding, the gendered metaphor of the *belles infidèles* became prominent: like women, it was fancifully suggested, translations could be either beautiful and unfaithful, or faithful but ugly. Lori Chamberlain, writing in (p. 97) 1988, offered an important rereading of this metaphor as an example of the double standard inherent historically in both textual and sexual politics, and drew attention to the master/slave metaphor that has also characterized a great deal of post-Renaissance thinking about translation. This kind of figurative language, much used in translators' prefaces, suggests that just as women and slaves must be subordinate to their husbands and masters, so translators must be subordinate to the original writer, hence, a

## The Translator as Cross-Cultural Mediator

---

translation is de facto an inferior textual product. Chamberlain's important essay goes right to the heart of centuries of writing about translation, and identifies issues about faithfulness that are still being debated today. The Italian adage *traduttore/traditore* (translator/betrayer) is another aspect of this contentious, long-running debate. At what stage, the question may be asked, does a translator diverge from the source so radically that the final product ceases to be perceived as a translation at all? And if the translator does not engage with the text so as to bring his or her own creativity into play, is the resulting translating no more than a slavish subordination to another writer's work?

Catford (1965) makes a distinction between linguistic and cultural untranslatability. Focusing on the question of what is untranslatable, he argues that linguistic untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical equivalent in the TL. Cultural untranslatability he saw as more complex and loosely formulated: something is culturally untranslatable when there is no equivalent situational feature in the source language. He cites the idea of a Finnish, Japanese, and English bathroom as an example of cultural untranslatability. A word for 'bathroom' may exist in a dictionary, but the bathroom itself and the way it is used in those three different contexts are not equivalent at all (see also Chapter 4).

Already in formulating his ideas about translation, Catford was anticipating a major shift in thinking about translation that came to fruition with the advent of translation studies in the 1970s. His approach to translation came out of his research in applied linguistics, whereas two decades after his book appeared, translation studies was no longer based in linguistics but had become an interdisciplinary field involving linguistics, literary and cultural studies, history, anthropology, sociology, and political science. Attention shifted from a focus on translation as a linguistic act, to a consideration of the additional elements in the translation process beyond the linguistic. The ground-breaking work of both Catford and Nida began to come together.

Today, the role of the translator has been radically rethought. In his book, aptly entitled *The Translator's Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti explores the history of translation in the Anglo-American world, arguing that the illusion of fluency—i.e. creating the impression that a text has not actually been translated at all—marginalizes translation and effectively renders translators invisible. He points out that the illusion of transparency 'conceals the numerous conditions under which a translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention in the foreign text' (Venuti 1995: 1–2). The greater the fluency, the more the translator is hidden from (p. 98) view, rendered invisible and marginalized as a result of that invisibility. Venuti's book is a call to arms for translators, proposing that translators should emphasize their presence in a text, and even suggesting some strategies (most notably the idea of 'foreignization') to redress the balance.

Venuti's book was published in 1995. Three years later, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere published a collection of essays entitled *Constructing Cultures*. This book extended their earlier thinking about the so-called 'cultural turn' in translation studies, and stressed the need for the emerging field to investigate particular questions:

The more the image of one culture is constructed for another by translations, the more important it becomes to know how the process of rewriting develops, and what kinds of rewritings/translations are produced. Why are certain texts rewritten/translated, and not others? What is the agenda behind the production of rewritings/translations? How are the techniques of translating used in the service of a given agenda? Rewriters and translators are the people who really construct cultures on the basic level in our day and age. (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 10)

Bassnett and Lefevere acknowledged the growing role of translation in an increasingly globalized world, and stressed the need for greater awareness and understanding of how that role works. The cultural turn raised further important questions about agency, about the circumstances under which translations might be transformative, and about the impact of translation in a given culture at a particular moment in time.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe, for example, the translation of literary texts such as the poems of Lord Byron or the plays of William Shakespeare had a huge impact on various revolutionary struggles for independence in the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. This was on account of the importance of creating and sustaining a national literature, in a national language which, in many cases, had been subordinate to the imperial languages. So the Czech Revival movement involved translation in order to strengthen a literature that was being created in a language that had been marginalized. We can see this pattern in many other contexts also; the translation into Welsh of the Bible in the sixteenth century effectively saved the Welsh language from

extinction, as English became the dominant language, both politically and socially.

The political role of translation in certain contexts has not always been in the interests of revolutionary change, however. Tejaswini Niranjana and other postcolonial scholars have pointed out that translation tends to take place within an unequal power relationship, where often one culture is in a dominant position. In the case of the colonial period in India, for example, she argues that 'translation reinforce(d) hegemonic versions of the colonised, helping them to acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representation or objects without history' (Niranjana 1992: 176). It is still the case that the power relationships embedded in (p. 99) global economic networks have a major impact on what comes to be translated and how translations are then distributed. The dominance of English as a world language means that for a writer to be a global success, he or she has to be published in that language. The so-called 'boom' of Latin American writing in the 1970s that brought novelists such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes to international attention was a direct result of skilled translation into English and good marketing. All had been writing in Spanish to critical acclaim, but it was through translation that they became household names internationally. The market power of the English-speaking world has meant that many Latin American, African, and Indian writers have felt compelled to publish in that language, either by opting for English as their writing language or by having their work translated. This is despite the very small percentage of published translations in English in terms of the overall number of books published. While some markets, particularly those of minority-language cultures, see a high percentage of books in translation, the scale of translation into English remains small. Yet so great is the dominance of English globally that a writer's reputation can increase phenomenally once his or her work starts to appear in English.

The importance of translation in a sociocultural context should not be underestimated. The history of colonialism, for example, is also a history of translation. The case of the Treaty of Waitangi, a document signed in 1840 between a representative of the British crown and several hundred Maori chiefs in what was then the newly established colony of New Zealand, is a fascinating example of the legacy of uncertainty that some translations can leave behind. In its time, the Treaty was an example of enlightened thinking, an attempt to establish a partnership between the British settlers and the local Maori peoples. The document was drawn up in English, and was then translated into Maori by Henry Williams, the head of the Church Missionary Society in New Zealand. In an essay analysing this translation, Sabine Fenton and Paul Moon point out that it was undertaken at high speed, that the technical languages of the English was rendered into very simple Maori terms, that Williams tried to avoid all terms that did not have direct equivalents in Maori, that there were some omissions, and—perhaps most significantly—words and concepts were employed that had come to mean something different to the Maori from the way they were used in the Treaty. So for example,

The key concepts of 'sovereign authority', 'civil government', and 'powers of sovereignty' were all translated by Williams with the same term: *kawanatanga*, 'governance'. The concept of sovereignty in English is complex in legal documents and includes the power of jurisdiction at national as well as international levels, meanings that the term *kawanatanga* did not cover. (Fenton and Moon 2002: 33)

The repercussions of the lack of clarity in the Maori translation continued well into the twentieth century, culminating in the creation of a tribunal to resolve issues of Maori land rights never fully clarified in the original document. For although the (p. 100) Treaty was supposed to protect the Maori people and ensure cooperation between them and the settlers, the vagueness of the wording and the textual ambiguities meant that adherence to the Treaty could be, and was, selective.

While New Zealand today has returned to a re-examination of the Treaty and the implications of Williams's over-hasty translation, in the United States there has been a different movement: from a multilingual point in the earliest years of European settlement to a focus on the importance of having a single, national language, that of the original Constitution. In his book *Translation and Identity in the Americas* (2006), Edwin Gentzler points out that though studies of the United States in terms of class, race, and gender abound, studies of the role played by translation, of language minorities, and the history of the gradual erasure of other languages under the rising dominance of English are few in number. Yet the early years of settlement and colonization necessarily involved multilingualism. Here too, political history is directly linked to the history of translations.

### 7.4 The translator's identity

---

In Latin America, the process of colonization followed slightly different paths from the north. Significantly, two now legendary figures have emerged in both contexts, both female and both associated with translation and intercultural communication. In North America, that figure is Pocahontas, daughter of a tribal chief who acts as intermediary and then falls in love with a British officer, Captain John Smith. In Latin America, it is the rather more complex figure of La Malinche, daughter of an Aztec chieftain who became mistress and interpreter for Hernan Cortes in his Mexican campaign. In both cases translation and female sexuality are linked, and in the case of La Malinche in particular, subsequent evaluation of her role in what was to be the conquest of Mexico and destruction of the Aztec empire has tended to see her as a betrayer of her own culture, as someone who persuaded her own people not to resist the incomers, rather than as a facilitator of communication between peoples. The story of La Malinche highlights the ambiguity that often surrounds the translator in a highly charged political context. More recently, the plight of translators and interpreters caught up in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has been brought to media attention; though vital to the allies in their campaign, such people are often the object of vilification and death threats from their fellow-countrymen. Nor is translation only dangerous in a war zone: in 2000, two Iranian translators involved in a conference held in Berlin organized by the Heinrich Böll Foundation were sentenced to long periods of imprisonment for the crime of 'waging war against God'. Earlier, in 1991, the Japanese translator of (p. 101) Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was stabbed to death, while Rushdie's Italian translator narrowly escaped the same fate. Translation can be an extremely dangerous activity, whether in a war zone or in a context where there are serious threats to freedom of expression. The translator becomes the locus of fantasies of usurpation and betrayal, and in the case of Rushdie's translators, once the fatwa against him had been issued by the Iranian clergy, no distinction was made between the writer and his translators. The case of the murder of Rushdie's Japanese translator highlights the complex question of the separate identities of writer and translator, raising the issue as to when a translator becomes a substitute for another writer, effectively that writer's double.

### 7.5 Mediating between cultures

By the end of the 1980s, massive changes to the political, social, and economic systems globally meant that there was an unprecedented movement of peoples moving between countries, some fleeing from persecution, others seeking new opportunities to build a better life. The collapse of the Soviet Union and China's open door policy had major repercussions on the movement of populations, as did the combination of famine and political instability in the African continent. As more people began to move, so linguistic priorities began to change. In countries across Europe, for example, schools began to tackle the issue of the multilingual classroom, and health services began to employ translators to enable the treatment of patients from countries around the world. It was around this time that the term 'cultural interpreter' began to emerge—a term that highlights the importance of a translation process that involves more than spoken or written language, and encompasses a recognition of cultural difference.

In a study of bilingual and bicultural writing, Azade Seyhan contrasts traditional models equating monolingualism with national identity, against the new plurilingualism of a changing world and argues:

Once we accept the loss of stable communities and the inevitability of exile, then the interdependency of linguistic and cultural experiences both at the local and global level become self-evident. Thus, despite coercively manufactured and enforced national antinomies and fortified borders, history and geography are transfigured in new maps and new types of dialogic links. (Seyhan 2001: 9)

This process of transfiguration involves what has come to be termed 'transnationalism', a way of conceptualizing intercultural transmission beyond national boundaries. It is obvious that such transmission processes will involve interlingual exchange to some extent, hence translation needs to be understood in the broadest (p. 102) sense of the term. In his book *Translating Cultures*, David Katan makes a distinction between the three categories detailed in his subtitle; his book sets out to be an introduction for translators, interpreters, and mediators whilst recognizing that they overlap. He also raises the problem of the extent of the knowledge base of a translator who is effectively a mediator between cultures. In order to be such an effective mediator, does the translator necessarily have to be bicultural to some extent? A variant of this question had long been posed by translation scholars focusing on the analysis of texts and asking whether it was necessary for a translator to be effectively bilingual. Now, alongside bilingualism, biculturalism was taking its place, though definitions of biculturalism remained fuzzy. Katan declares that a cultural mediator is someone who 'facilitates communication, understanding and action between persons or groups who differ with respect to language and culture' (Katan 2004: 17). This is uncontentious, but then he goes



on to suggest that this role must also involve interpreting not just the expressions of each cultural group, but also the intentions, perceptions, and expectations, which is much more problematic. The cultural interpreter, by this definition, is expected to go far beyond what is actually expressed and has to endeavour to second-guess the unexpressed. Katan suggests that a cultural interpreter should be to some extent bicultural, but this reduces culture to a homogeneous concept that does not take into account the vast differences between individuals who claim to belong to a certain culture, differences of age, class, gender, race, religion, education, and so forth.

### 7.6 Cultural translation

Alongside the advent of the term 'cultural mediation', the term 'cultural translation' has also come into being, generally used to refer to transactions that do not explicitly involve linguistic exchange. In his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha uses the terminology of translation to talk about the transnational. He theorizes in-betweenness, a space implicit in the experience of migrants, and argues that this condition is becoming a new global reality for millions of people. What must be studied and mapped, as he puts it, in this new international space of discontinuous realities is 'the problem of signifying, the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the "in-between"' (Bhabha 1994: 217). Bhabha takes up Walter Benjamin's ideas about translation as after-life, as that which ensures the survival of a text in a new context, and he also faces up to the inherent contradiction in translation, which is that even as a translator seeks to render a text constructed in one context so as to bring it across into another, the very process of attempting to do that brings the translator face to face with those (p. 103) elements of a text that actively resist being translated. In other words, translation involves confronting the untranslatable, and that untranslatability can also be seen as the migrant's inability for whatever reason to assimilate into the new culture. What Bhabha does, therefore, is to use the concept and terminology of translation to talk about the migrant's problems of assimilation and the ways in which writers seek to explore their hybrid linguistic and cultural identities in their work.

The impact of Bhabha's notion of cultural translation on postcolonial literary theory has been far-reaching, and it can be argued that there are now two distinct critical discourses both employing similar terminology but quite distinct in aims and methods. From a postcolonial perspective, translation is employed metaphorically as a device for understanding the plurality of identity issues that come out of a condition of migrancy. From within translation studies, the idea of the cultural turn has been developed to include research into translation and global power relations. In his book *Translation and Globalization*, the Irish translation scholar Michael Cronin examines the expansion of machine translation, the impact of global markets, the increased speed of communication, and the risks posed to minority languages by the domination of English. In a chapter entitled 'New Translation Paradigms', he argues that translation, in what he sees as an increasingly fragile biological and cultural ecosystem is 'more real and more important than ever' (Cronin 2003: 74).

The importance of translation in the twenty-first century is highlighted by Bella Brodzki, in an important study of translation as cultural invigoration. *Can These Bones Live?* is subtitled *Translation, Survival and Cultural Memory*, and in her introduction Brodzki announces that there is what she terms 'a rise in translative consciousness everywhere in the humanities' and proceeds to sketch out the basis of her own understanding of translation (Brodzki 2007: 1). Acknowledging a debt to Walter Benjamin and to Jacques Derrida for opening up the debates around the idea of translation as survival, she also acknowledges the emergence of translation studies as a distinct field and the growing interest in translation within comparative literature. Brodzki's book is important in that she draws together these disparate lines of enquiry which had been at risk of becoming antipathetic, with postmodernist scholars and translation studies scholars each developing their own terminology of translation and failing to recognize the insights of one another. Brodzki states plainly that translations should not be set apart as a different sort of text, since they, like all forms of writing, are embedded in a series of sociopolitical networks. Affirming the arguments of Bassnett and Lefevere from the early 1990s, she asserts that translations are subject to the constraints of the external conditions of the contexts in which they are produced. Then she makes a bold, far-reaching claim for the importance of translation as a transaction that underpins contemporary life and society. Just as we now have to take into account gender as a category for exploring 'authorship, agency, subjectivity, performativity, multiculturalism, (p. 104) postcolonialism, transnationalism, diasporic literacy, and technological literacy', so we also need to take into account translation:

Translation is no longer seen to involve only narrowly circumscribed technical procedures of specialized

or local interest, but rather to underwrite all cultural transactions, from the most benign to the most venal. (Brodzki 2007: 2)

Brodzki's huge claims for the importance of translation reflect a heightened awareness more generally of the importance of intercultural communication in the wake of 9/11. In an essay entitled 'Translation, Ethics and Ideology in a Violent Globalizing World', Maria Tymoczko argues that translators do not occupy a neutral space, since they are 'among the chief mediators between cultures', and stresses the importance of ensuring that ethical and ideological dimensions are included in translator training programmes (Tymoczko 2009: 184).

Yet the increase in demand for translation has not to date been matched by an increase in the status of translators, nor in the level of remuneration for translation. Nevertheless, the rising significance of translation in global communication is undeniable. However, as indicated earlier in this essay, linguistic competence is no longer the prerequisite for a good translator. What matters increasingly is intercultural competence, and significantly some training programmes in business and management studies, for example, focus on teaching intercultural awareness without formal language requirements. Airport bookstalls abound in guides to doing business in other cultures, while travel books such as the Rough Guide or Lonely Planet series provide information on other cultures that includes details of how to behave in certain situations. So, for example, the traveller might be advised that it is offensive to blow one's nose publicly in Japan, or rude to offer one's hostess a bouquet of flowers without first removing the paper the flowers were wrapped in when visiting in Germany. In the guides to intercultural business, information is provided on differences in work ethic, timekeeping, the significance of formal as opposed to informal meetings, dress codes, the use of titles, and so forth.

### 7.7 Translation and the media

The development of translation studies as an independent field has not been a linear process, and today there are a number of different approaches to the study of translation and to the training of translators. The two most significant lines of development, however, have been what have come to be termed descriptive translation studies and Skopos theory respectively. The former has tended to focus more on literary translation, and through the work of pioneering scholars such as Itamar (p. 105) Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury, André Lefevere, and James Holmes, research into translation has expanded to encompass the history of translation, the changing patterns of translation norms, and the reception of translations in the target culture. Indeed, descriptive translation scholars have focused so firmly on the fortunes of a text in the receiving culture that they have triggered a re-investigation of the role played by translation in literary history more generally.

The Skopos research, though similar in that it too sets translation in context and can be broadly said also to be a cultural approach, has been applied to a wider range of texts beyond the literary, and has proved to be particularly useful where translation and mass media are concerned. Skopos theory was developed in the 1980s by the German translation scholars Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer. They argued that the objective of a translation would determine how it was translated—in other words the function a translation was intended to have would then play a direct role in the actual process of translating. This meant, at its simplest, that a translation could be highly effective and could fulfil its original purpose and yet could deviate enormously from the source. We need only think of the translation of legal or technical materials, for example, to see why this should be so. A legal document in one language will be constructed according to the norms governing that type of text in that context; to translate it literally would be foolish, since the norms and conventions of the target context are bound to be different. Examples of bad translation abound; everyone has read tourist brochures, hotel information, or restaurant menus that have been translated literally and as a result are either comical or meaningless. The Skopos approach dismisses the idea of literal or even close translation and opts instead for a functional translation strategy, one that will serve the purpose for which the translation is being undertaken. The approach is underpinned by the idea of equivalent effect; hence there is a totally different concept of what constitutes equivalence. The task of the translator who follows this functional method is to read, decode, and then reconstruct a text for a target audience, bearing in mind differences not only of linguistic structure, style, and vocabulary, but also of context, culture, and audience expectation.

In an essay entitled 'Translating Terror' (Bassnett 2005) I examined the ethics of an acculturation translation strategy when translating politically sensitive texts from non-European cultures. I drew attention to the way in which

political speeches by leaders in the Arab world often retained rhetorical features of the source culture that carry a completely different signification. So, for example, while understatement is a powerful rhetorical tool in English, overstatement may be an equally powerful tool in Arabic. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990) have looked at how genres can be combined and blurred in Arabic and Farsi, so that religious sermonizing and political tirades can be fused together. To do this in an English-language context is to move straight into hyperbole, which casts doubt on the veracity of what is being said. Saddam Hussein's famous phrase 'the mother of all battles' became, translated literally into English, a comic image that was then taken (p. 106) up and used by political cartoonists. The apocalyptic tone of some Arab politicians' speeches, though appropriate in the source context, is exaggerated to the point of becoming ridiculous when translated without regard for the intended function of such rhetorical devices.

The translation of political speeches is a contentious area and one that is starting to receive more critical attention. For translation of these texts is directly linked to media representation, and such has been the acceleration of change in mass communications in recent years that the practice of translation for the media is rapidly becoming an area of study in its own right. Television news networks now aim to bring information to viewers almost instantly, as indicated by the concept of 'breaking news' which we all take for granted today. Christina Schäffner has pointed out that reactions in one country to what is said in another country are 'actually reactions to the information as it was provided in translation' (Schäffner 2004b: 120). This may seem self-evident, but is actually much more problematic, for in media translation the translator is perhaps even more invisible than with the translation of other genres, despite having a significant role to play in the process of shaping the information that is being transmitted.

Schäffner and Bassnett (2010) argue that media translation necessarily involves recontextualization, and always has a powerful ideological dimension. Institutional policies and ideologies play a significant role (the house style and political stance of a newspaper or television channel will affect the translation, for example, as will the censorship regulations determined by a particular nation state), in short:

Mass media enable communication across languages and cultures, but in doing so, they can privilege specific information at the expense of other information, and they can also hinder and prohibit information from being circulated. (Schäffner and Bassnett 2010: 8)

Recontextualization is the most evident of a series of complex processes of interlingual transfer that are involved in the business of global news translation. As information is transferred at high speed from one language to another, it also undergoes various other transformations, which include editing, abridging, and restructuring in accordance with the norms and values of the target medium. So, for example, a long interview conducted by a journalist in one language that, were it to be written up, might consist of tens of thousands of words, can end up as a soundbite in quotation marks in a newspaper in another language, purporting to be a translation of something that has been said but which may only have a scant relationship with the source. This is because that long source text will have had to be summarized, the summary then translated, and that text reshaped to fulfil its new function. Through the internet it is possible now to see at a glance the diversity of reports of the same incident, a diversity that raises intriguing questions about the veracity of what is consumed by the target audience and about the definition of translation itself.

### (p. 107) 7.8 Conclusion

At the start of this essay, the task of the translator was defined as that of rendering a text written in one language into another. The case of news translation and, by extension, other forms of internet translation challenge that definition, since either the source will have undergone a whole series of modifications that go far beyond the binary, or else there may not be a clear source at all and what is presented as a translation may be a kind of collage. In an essay based on her direct experience as a news translator for FTV, the Taiwanese Formosa TV channel, Claire Tsai (2005) recounts how texts are frequently drastically cut and news flows restructured completely to fit the needs of the target viewers. In such circumstances, the role of the translator is very different from that of someone negotiating a linguistic or even a cultural divide, but it still involves a form of textual transfer.

Despite the immense changes in global communications that are happening with increasing speed, St Jerome's old distinction between word-for-word and sense-for-sense translation still resonates. The functional approach advocated by the Skopos theorists has come to be seen as particularly useful, and there are huge developments



in machine translation, but the task of mediating between cultures, which involves negotiating understanding between global and local systems, is still one that requires human agency.

### Further reading and relevant sources

The cultural turn in translation studies is particularly well represented in Bassnett and Lefevere (1990). Niranjana (1992), Tiffin and Lawson (1994), and Bassnett and Trivedi (1999) are good guides to postcolonial translation studies, and Simon (1996) is a standard work on the relationship between gender and translation, an aspect of the cultural turn not covered in this chapter. Mousten (2008) is an interesting case study of globalization and localization in translation, while Venuti (1995) has become the standard work on translator identity. Bhabha (1994) is the main representative of the cultural translation metaphor, and Schäffner and Bassnett (2010) represents the recent focus on the role of translation in the political and media spheres.

#### Susan Bassnett

Susan Bassnett was, until her retirement in 2010, Professor of Comparative Literature at Warwick University and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She has written extensively on translation, intercultural communication, comparative and world literature, including *Translation in Global News*, with Esperance Bielsa (2009) and an edited volume on translation and political discourse with Christina Schaeffner (2010).



Bilingual websites, cross-cultural communication, social semiotics, transcreation, corporate communication. With the worldwide web now a well-established channel of corporate communication, most businesses take advantage of the affordances offered by this medium. Web-based communication has provided companies with an efficient means of promoting products and services as well as maintaining and building internal and external interpersonal relations (Garzone 2009). The role of the translator as an advisor and as a mediator is closely linked. According to Hatim and Mason (1990: 236), "the translator takes on the role of mediator between different cultures, each of which has its own vision of reality, ideologies, myths, and so on." KEY WORDS: Community Interpreting and Translating, Mediation; intercultural communication; migration. For the translator/mediator it is simply impossible to think of himself as someone who supplants the personality of another, as a mere vicar of another. What is more, this is also what those for whom the translation was done expect from him/her. So to not assume the responsibility that corresponds to him/her as a mediator could cause the translator to get a bad reputation, much more of course than the sometimes unavoidable infidelities that the audience simply cannot be conscious of. Hernández is not defending the arbitrary transfer of information as some may think. In facing this challenge of being mediators of culture the translator is engaged in a process of interpreting meta-language, and deciding what is relevant to the audience in question. The translator has found it necessary to make explicit the information regarding Nouméa, which would have been obvious to a French reader (but less well-known to Guardian readers in the UK), while deleting "Australia" as being obvious to an English reader. As such it will be a very useful resource for both teaching staff and students on CLTL Meaning and Communication and Translation courses " it will provide relevant examples, and help folk see Bible translation within the general context of cross-cultural communication. David Gray Redcliffe College. Related Papers.