Translating with Purpose: The Functionality Paradigm

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Abstract: The present paper aims to explore the functional approach to translation, which focuses on the purpose, function and intended effect of the translated text. The main proponents of the functionalist approaches Katharina Reiss, Hans Vermeer, Christiane Nord acknowledge that translation does not imply only linguistic correspondence between the target and source text and promote the idea according to which it is the communicative function of the text in the target culture that determines the method of translation. They start from the assumption that the text-type allows the translator to recognize the function and the purpose of the text as well as the author's intention. Thus, s/he will inevitably resort to different techniques and strategies in order to successfully render the source text meaning into the target language. The examination of the most important studies related to this approach has provided us the theoretical framework that will serve as a foundation for our research: the translation of medical/pharmaceutical texts.

Keywords: functionalist approaches; translation-oriented text typologies; Skopos theory; text-types; translation studies

1. Introduction

In the last decades, researchers have suggested a variety of approaches in order to tackle the translation of specialized genres and consequently, the translation of medical/pharmaceutical texts that are affiliated to this field. However, among these perspectives, the functional approach has consistently demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing the complexities of medical translation.The functional approach, rooted in the principles of functional linguistics and translation studies, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the communicative purpose and the

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function of texts in translation. By adopting this perspective, translators focus on the relationship between the form and the function of texts, examining the way in which linguistic features, genre conventions, and cultural particularities impact the translation process. This approach emphasizes the importance of cultural context, allowing for more accurate and contextually appropriate translations. Moreover, the functional approach acknowledges that texts serve a variety of functions, ranging from informative to persuasive, instructional, or expressive. It underlines that the translation of these functions requires a careful analysis of the source and target text, as well as the cultural and situational contexts in which they are used. By considering these aspects, the functional approach provides valuable insights into how texts are adapted according to the linguistic and cultural particularities of the target readers. Considering its focus on communicative effectiveness, the functional approach has proved to be the most appropriate perspective for investigating the translation of medical/pharmaceutical texts. Its theoretical foundations and practical insights contribute to a better understanding of the translation process and offer guidance for professionals working in the field.

2. Reiss's Translation-Oriented Text Typologies

Katharina Reiss's work has brought a notable contribution in the field of translation studies, specifically in the field of functionalist approaches to translation. Reiss emphasizes the importance of analysing the communicative function and purpose of texts in translation. According to her, the functionalist approach involves the analysis of the source text and the understanding of its communicative intention in order to create an appropriate target text. Reiss supports the idea of functional equivalence, which implies that the translation should achieve the same communicative effect as the source text, regardless of the linguistic and cultural differences between the source and target languages. Reiss also underlines the importance of considering the *skopos* (purpose) of the translation, which involves understanding the intended function of the target text in the target culture. This means that the translator should take into account the needs and expectations of the target audience and adjust the translation accordingly. Reiss notes that a translation should not aim for a literal or word-for-word equivalence, but rather focus on achieving the desired communicative effect within the target culture. In her work (Reiss,1976), she refers to this concept as *functional equivalence* and proposes a '*functional oriented text-typology*', distinguishing the following text-types, each of them performing a particular communicative function:

- *the informative text – Plain communication of facts*, the main function of this text-type is to communicate information (arguments, opinions, knowledge); the topic, that is at the centre of the communication process, dictates the choice of verbalization; the form of language used is functional language, which is logical, objective, and referential.

- *the expressive text – Creative composition*, the author focusses on expressing the content in an artistic manner using the aesthetic dimension of language; the sender is in the foreground deciding the means of verbalization which are expressive and creative.

- *the operative text – The inducing of behavioural responses*, the main function of this text-type is to influence the audience to behave in a certain way, to perform a particular action; the form of verbalization is determined by the receiver by virtue of his being approachable; the persuasive dimension of language is used.

- *the audio-medial text* – these types of texts supplement the other three functions with images or music (films, videos, spoken advertisements).

Despite the fact that some text-types display more than one function, being *hybrid types,* (for instance the *Patient Information Leaflet* is an informative text that fulfils at the same time an operative function by attempting to persuade the audience to behave in a certain way), Reiss states that "the transmission of the predominant function of the ST is the determining factor by which the TT is judged" (Reiss, 1989). She suggests specific translation methods according to each text type (Reiss,1976). The translation of an *informative text-type* should transmit the conceptual content of the source text in an accurate and unequivocal way, '*plain prose*', focussing on rendering the information and terminology rather than the aesthetic dimension. On the other hand, *expressive text-types* should be translated using the '*identifying*' method, that implies the transmission of the artistic form and content from the source text into the target text, in addition securing the accurateness of information and the author's particular style. The translation of an *operative text-type* should generate the expected response from the part of the target text receiver. This translation method is termed '*adaptive*' and involves the use of the translator's creative skills in order to produce an engaging target text, meant to attract the audience's attention and to induce a certain type of behaviour. Finally, the translation of *audio-medial texts* demands the '*supplementary*' method that implies the supplementation of text with visuals and /or music.

Reiss has also provided a series of extralinguistic and extralinguistic criteria that can be used in order to assess the accuracy of a translation. These can be listed as follows: 1) *linguistic components* (semantic equivalence, lexical equivalence, grammatical and stylistic features); 2) *non-linguistic determinants* (situation, time, cultural particularities, receiver, sender, 'affective implications'), (Reiss,1971). She points out that the importance of these criteria varies according to text-type and genre since they are valid in the situations where the source text and the target text share the same function (Munday, 2016). More specifically, the translation of a PIL, which is mainly an informative text, should respect the conventions of the specialized/ medical genre and should preserve the semantic equivalence from the source text. Munday notes that:

"Reiss's work is important because it moves the translation theory beyond a consideration of lower linguistic levels, the mere words on the page, beyond even the effect they create, towards a consideration of the communicative function of translation" (Munday, 2016).

Her studies offer a systematic way of analyzing text-types and identifying their communicative functions, as well as providing appropriate translation methods that can serve as guidelines in the translation process.

3. Vermeer's Skopos Theory

One of the most significant functionalist theories, introduced by Hans Vermeer (1983) provides the model based on the concept of '*skopos*' or '*aim*' of translation, emphasising the idea that it is the function of the translation, its skopos (Reiss and Vermeer, 2014), that determines the procedure to follow in the translation process. Vermeer considers that the source text is an offer of information from where the translator will choose only the elements that will help him reach the *aim* or the *skopos* of translation. Aiming to provide a general translation theory that could be used for every textual type, Reiss and Vermeer's work *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, provides a comprehensive analysis of the skopos theory, adapting, at the same time, the functional text-type approach suggested by Reiss to their theory.

Reiss and Vermeer (2014) summarize the general 'rules' for the translation process as follows:

1. A translatum is determined by its skopos.

2. A translatum is an offer of information in a target culture and language about an offer of information in a source culture and language.

3. A translatum is a unique, irreversible mapping of a source-culture offer of information.

4. A translatum must be coherent in itself.

5. A translatum must be coherent with the source text.

6. These rules are interdependent and linked hierarchically in the order set out above.

In trying to synthetize these rules, Munday (2016) notices that, firstly, a translation must fulfil its aim or skopos, secondly, it must be coherent, and finally, it must demonstrate coherence with the source text. He points out that the skopos theory allows the translator to translate a text in different ways according to the skopos (purpose) of the TT and to the requirements of the commission given to him/her. He concludes that this theory leads to a dethroning of the source text in favour of reaching the functional purpose of the TT as established by the commission. Nevertheless, the skopos theory has generated many controversial opinions, namely from the part of the contrastive linguistics' proponents who have perceived translation as a two-phase code-switching operation, that tries to reproduce as faithful as possible the structures of the source text into the target text. This theory defines translation as an information in another language about a text that, in its turn is perceived as another source of information. Translation as an offer of information is oriented specifically towards the situation of the target culture's recipient. Consequently, only the information required or appropriated in the target culture situation is offered and the translator needs to be aware of the way in which the target culture recipient expects to receive this information. This translation approach is opposite to translation as a two-phase transcoding process, where only the faithful rendering of the source text form and structure is permitted.

4. Cristiane Nord - Functionalism in Translator Training

Cristiane Nord (1991) stresses the idea according to which, while functionality represents the most salient criterion for a translation, this does not allow the translator to make his/her own choices without considering the relationship between the source text and the target text. The nature of this relationship is determined by the purpose or skopos that provides the translator the elements from the source text that must be preserved into the target text and the ones that must be adapted to the

source culture situation. She introduces the '*functionality plus loyality concept'* (Nord, 1991, p.32), stating that it must be a compatibility between the purpose of the source text and the target translation *skopos*, while also preserving the author's original intention. According to her, the translator must be faithful to both, the source text, and the target culture situation, and must respect alongside, the sender's intention and the target text receiver's expectations. Nord calls this responsability –'*loyality*' and adds that on the basis of the *'functionality plus loyality'* concept, the translator must preserve certain aspects of the source text such as: syntactic structures, terminology, form (in a literal translation) and omit/replace others or offer further explanations, when required, in order to achieve the target text *skopos*.

The German scholar acknowledges the need of producing a model of translation-oriented text analysis that can serve as a general theoretical framework, applicable to all text types and translation situations, in order to enable the translators "justify their translational decisions, to systematize translation problems, and to understand translational behaviour conventions more clearly" (Nord,1991, p.2). Since certain text-types, sharing the same function, displaying the same conventional forms, have been continuously used in certain situations, they have started to be perceived as social norms which are expected to be recognized and followed by all the agents implied in the communication process. Nord (Nord,1991, p.20) underlines the fact that text-types norms and conventions have a significant role in both, text production and text reception, since the text producers must follow the conventions in order to achieve their communicative purposes, while the receivers are supposed to understand, to infer the text producer's intentions by recognizing the conventional form of the text.

5. Critical Evaluations

In her article, *The Many Contexts of Translation (Studies)*, **Rodica Dimitriu** (Dimitriu, 2015, p.12) underlines the idea according to which, the most significant difference between the functional approach and other translation frameworks based on pragmatics/discourse analysis, relies in the fact that functionalist models integrate the cultural dimension and the extra-textual factors of translation as well, and perceives the translational action not only as a transfer between linguistic codes but also as an exchange between cultures. She points out that such a perspective places functionalist approaches halfway "between pragmatic and socio-cultural approaches to translation studies", (Dimitriu, 2015, p. 12). The common ground they share with

the pragmatic models consists in the "intratextual (linguistic, textual, generic, semiotic) perspective on the translated texts" (Dimitriu, 2015, p. 12). Regarding the common points between the functionalist and the socio-cultural approaches to translation, Dimitriu mentions the following aspects: the function of the text in the target culture, the situationality of the source text and target text, the social agents involved in the translational action (author, translator, commissioners), the translation norms and other social/cultural aspects that must be considered, beyond the textual approach to translation.

Referring to norms in translation, Rodica Dimitriu (Dimitriu, 2002, p. 48) mentions that norms function as guidelines that have to be followed by translators in order to achieve what is considered a 'right' translation by the authors of such texts. She adds that Nord has chosen to term them '*conventions*' with a view to reduce their imperative coercion and to offer translators a certain freedom when using them (Dimitriu, 2002, p.54). Nord distinguishes between *constitutive conventions* which are "what a particular culture community accepts as a translation (as opposed to an adaptation, version or other forms of intercultural transfer) and *regulative conventions* that refer to "the generally accepted forms of handling certain translation problems below the text rank" (Dimitriu, 2002, p. 55).

6. Conclusion

The functionalist perspective on translation, represented by scholars like: Katharina Reiss, who has analysed text functions and text-typologies; Hans Vermeer who has introduced the *skopos theory*; Christiane Nord who has proposed her seminal translation model, (based on the previous functionalist research), that can serve as guidelines for any translation process, has marked an important shift in Translation Studies' field in 1980' and 1990'. Their studies have brought into discussion the extratextual and the socio-cultural aspects of translation and have outlined a new perspective. The translation is not perceived anymore as a transcoding operation, but as a process of human action governed by a certain purpose (*skopos*). To sum up, the functional approach reinforces the importance of understanding the communicative purpose, function, and target audience of a text in translation. By considering these factors, translators can provide translations that are adapted to the context, functionally equivalent, and effectively convey the intended message in the target language and culture.

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