

CHRISTOPH GUTKNECHT / LUTZ J. RÖLLE: *Translating by Factors*. Albany, N.Y. State University of New York Press, 1996.

Students of translation always have to deal with the question of how "literal" their rendition of a text into another language should be, and sometimes it may appear to them that it is their teacher who decides what constitutes an acceptable "transfer of meaning." Clearly, texts are characterized by many different grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic features--some of which may not be explicit and certainly not obvious--that need to be taken into account to produce a "satisfactory" translation. The process of identifying, assessing, and weighting of the source language (SL) text features should ideally result in a reduplicable matrix for which grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic equivalencies can be found in the target language (TL). Gutknecht and Rölle's *Translating by Factors* endeavors to establish such a matrix of factors governing the production of a given text which may serve as the basis for a rendition into the target language.

This book is unique in many ways, among them because it makes a major theoretical contribution toward conceptualizing a theory of translation *and* applies the insights in a case study approach to a subset of English and German structures, the modal auxiliaries. The research question is: "Given an SL modal, which TL modal(s) or other expression(s) can be used to render it? and [sic] vice versa, Given [sic] an SL expression, is there a TL modal to render it?" (p. 8). In other words, this study offers a tested and testable framework for further research on the factors which may be required for "high-fidelity" translations. More than 1,100 English and German sentences embodying modality are used as the test corpus and are analyzed and fitted into the proposed factor framework with care and attention to detail.

A discussion of the functions and effects accompanies the identification and systematization of "translation factors" which they have in the dimensions of syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Chapters 2-4) and in spoken and written language (Chapter 5). Subsequent chapters show different translation units as relevant factors and the influence of factors that are essential elements of any translation situation. The final chapter examines more theoretical issues such as the distinction between "translation" and "adaptation" in the light of the notion of "factor."

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Translation factors are assigned by their function to twenty classes, such as *invariance factors* (which make a SL reappear in the TL rendition), *change factors* (which make an SL feature disappear or a new or additional feature appear in the TL rendition); *partial change factors* (which make an SL feature appear partially different in the TL rendition). *Bidirectional factors* operate in both directions; *unidirectional factors* operate in only one translation direction; *blocking factors* render a specific translation impossible; *compensation factors* compensate for the effect of blocking factors; *convergence factors* give rise to a number of forms that is smaller than that of the SL forms; and so on. Finally, according to their 'strength', factors may be obligatory or optional." (pp. 5-6)

In each chapter, English and German usages of modal auxiliaries are contrasted and the

governing factors are elucidated. For example, in the chapter on syntax and morphology, a definitional criterion is "Word Class", and "Nominal and Adjectival Use" is a subset:

### 2.8.1 Nominal and Adjectival Use

MUST and MÜSSEN (in its singular indicative form *muss*) may be used as verbal nouns.

(107) This book is a must.

(108) Dieses Buch ist ein Muss.

The formal equivalence of both constructions presents itself as a bilingual invariance factor. There is also an adjectival use of MUST:

(109) This is a must book.

Here, the impossibility of an equivalent construction in German acts as a transposition factor. The adjective in (109) would again have to be rendered as the verbal noun *ein Muss* (as in (108)) (p. 18).

Or, in the same class:

### 2.9 Selection restrictions

Some German full verbs, unlike their English equivalents, cannot take inanimate subjects; for example,

(149) Money can't buy everything.

(150) \*Geld kann nicht alles kaufen.

(151) Mit Geld kann man nicht alles kaufen.

(152) This tent can sleep four people.

(153) \*Dieses Zelt kann vier Leute schlafen.

(154) In diesem Zelt können vier Leute schlafen.

This change of a noun phrase into a prepositional phrase is necessary only if the invariance factors are both the modal verb (*can* -->kann) and the full verb (*buy*-->kaufen) with its restriction just mentioned.

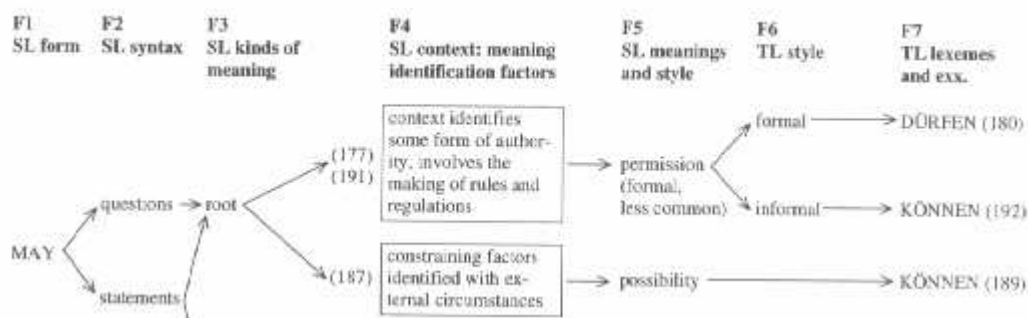
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If, however, the nominative status of the subject is to remain invariant, other verbs that do not impose the said restriction may (or have to) be chosen, such as

(155) Geld ermöglicht nicht alles.

(156) Dieses Zelt kann vier Leute aufnehmen/beherbergen. (p. 26)

Similar, very detailed attention is given to different meanings which give rise to different renditions of *may-can-mögen-dürfen-können*. The following (partial) figure demonstrates German renditions of MAY:



It is impossible in this brief review to present and discuss all issues of content and method addressed in the book. For readers of this *Journal*, it may be of interest to read an excerpt from the examination of "culture" as a factor and the difficulties which this factor presents in any rendition, especially where no equivalence exists. Drawing on from Snell-Hornby (1984), the authors offer the example of a railroad sign in Old Delhi (pp. 166-67):

(746) Passengers are kindly requested not to travel on the roof.

Clearly, this may be expressed by paraphrase as a command:

(747) Passengers must travel inside the train.

or as a prohibition:

(748) Passengers must not travel on the roof.

How should the mild directive in Indian English be rendered in German? Certainly the following would correspond to German cultural-linguistic norms:

(749) (Das) Reisen auf dem Dach (ist) streng verboten!

But rendering (746) by (749) amounts to ignoring the way in which public directions are given in English. On the other hand, the following rendition would not have the same illocutionary force and would appear incongruous to a German used to the explicit prohibition characterizing German public signs:

(750) Die Fahrgäste werden höflich gebeten, nicht auf dem Dach zu reisen

The authors suggest that the optimal way would be to offer the latter with a footnote reading:

(751) Anmerkung: In Indien werden selbst strenge Verbote oftmals als höfliche Bitten formuliert.

where the explanation serves as a compensation factor. The lengthy discussion following shows that the authors are very much aware of the difficulties associated with this "optimal" strategy: How much explanation CAN and SHOULD be offered by a translator? At any rate, this excursion illustrates the need for systematic strategies for bringing about "Fremdverstehen" discussion elsewhere in this number of the *Journal*.

According to the authors, this book is directed to "students of translating and interpreting, as well as intermediate and advanced learners of German or English" (p. 10). There is no doubt that these groups would benefit enormously from both "thinking in factors" and from the case study on the modal auxiliaries, which surely - among the hundreds of such investigations - may now be considered *the* definitive analysis. But this very exhaustiveness of the treatment, with its theoretical underpinnings, may make it difficult for students who are not yet virtually functionally bilingual to gain the full extent possible from the presentation. It would certainly be of immense interest and usefulness to anyone teaching advanced translation, to translators, and to practitioners of the craft: What has in the past often been intuitive can now be made explicit and quantifiable.

In the final section, the authors discuss the contribution of this model of "translation by factors" towards constructing a theory of translation, but they carefully - and justifiably - avoid laying claim to having developed such a theory. While it is indeed possible to conceptualize the dimensions of translation factors and their functions with this approach with a **specific** corpus of data and to generate new data which conform to **specific** permissible rules, it is not likely that this construct can lead to setting up specific testable hypotheses **in general** how a language unit is to be rendered in the other language in such a way that the rules predict new **general** data. The goal of developing "rules and recipes for translators" (Delisle 1988, p. 34, quoted on p. 274) remains elusive. Credit must go to Gutknecht and Rölle, however, for having developed an approach and a system which has high explanatory power and provides an effective conceptual tool for the analysis of the "fidelity" of translations.

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