



The Lama Temple, Beijing, China

This article was published in 2002 in *The Chinese Translators Journal* 23 # 2. 18-23 [182]

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THE PAINED ORIGINAL

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Abstract: Arguing that, outside class-rooms, discussions on the relationship between translated product and the 'original' do not advance our understanding of translation. the article analyses the nature of 'originals'. It points out that many originals are poorly composed and notes that there are efforts to make people write clearly. Attention is called to 'internationalisation' of texts for easy translation and 'localisation'. 'Cultural texts' present hurdles and it is exemplified how cultural information embedded is difficult to convey to foreign audiences. It is discussed how 'originals' change in time: this includes manuals as well as some 'classics' in literature. Other 'originals', notably in literature published in the UK and the US, change according to the country of publication. Finally, the article points out that at many international organisations, most obviously so at the European Union with eleven official languages, there is a division of labour. In this division one or two versions of texts (in English or French) are used first as repositories of the negotiations and as a record of agreements, then as the source text for the ten or nine other language versions, and in the end as one of the eleven equally authoritative texts of which none can claim superiority over the others.

Key-words: 'originals'; changes in source texts; cultural texts; source texts; poorly composed source texts.

The 'original', the translator and the 'translation'

Much thinking – notably of the prescriptive kind – in Translation Studies takes it for granted that the main problems in translation concern the translators and their presentation of the source-language original to the target language audience. This may or may not be true, but at the moment it is allowed to be the only theme discussed, it is an obstacle to unbiased approaches to other and more challenging problems in translation, both from a practical and from a theoretical point of view.

In this article, I shall focus on the nature of the 'original'. In order to make for a cogent discussion, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the 'original', the process (of transfer) and the end product, the 'translation'. This distinction is made clear in Illustration 1:

Illustration 1

Original > Process (of transfer) > (product of) Translation
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The 'original' is a message encoded in a source language. For some reason or other it is to be transferred into another language and in order to bring this about there is a process which takes place in a human mind – or at least it is assessed by a human being (a translator). In this process the message is cast in a linguistic form in the target language. This is the 'translation'.

There are other assumptions which are taken for granted, or at least rarely questioned. One is that the message in the source language is comprehensible. Furthermore, it is also implicitly assumed that the translator is always able to make sense of the source language message and can therefore render it adequately.

I deliberately use the word adequately, for in reality we cannot make a 'translation', which can in all respects impart the 'same' message to the audience in the target language as it did in the source language. This would require identity in form, sounds, individual words, syntax, sentence structure, etc. up to the macrolevel involving the complete text. The number of factors that would have to be identical in the two cultures, languages, peoples, and groups is staggering. If we had such 'similarity' in reality, it could be only within the same culture, the same people, the same group, indeed the same individual. What is more: this individual would have to remain the same, be static in all respects, mental as well as physical. This is impossible. So down the drain go naive views that the real problem for translation is how 'special tones' ought to be translated (for such a view, see Anz et al. (2000: 13-14)).

Instead, we shall here focus on problems concerning the nature of source texts and the challenges they may pose to translators.

The 'ideal original'

In an ideal world, an original will be fluent, idiomatic and meaningful.

The poor original

In the real world, there are poor originals.

Let us, for instance, ponder the following advertisement found in the description of a museum exhibition in a Copenhagen tourist brochure:

“Call it junk, bric a brac, refuse, detritus, or what you will but German artist Reinhard Ruhs – a professional collector of things – has assembled a wondrous or perhaps just ordinary collection of day-to-day objects from our modern culture for exhibition against a setting of 5,000-year-old ancient classical art in Copenhagen’s incomparable Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Museum.”

The translator might have done better, but the odds weighed heavily against her: the author of the original Danish advertisement hardly mastered her own language and this is aggravated by her efforts to squeeze far too much information into limited space.

It is rare for a translator to succeed in having the author of an original realise that the style of the original can be improved: this requires, first and foremost access to the author, but also diplomacy and a high degree of trust between the translator and her client. Nevertheless, there are a few cases on record, the most interesting one concerns a German product which was to be marketed in the UK. The translators pointed out a few awkward features in the German original, and the original was subsequently changed to read more fluently – in German (Franklin and Wilton 2000).

Some institutions are aware of the importance of composing texts which read fluently and are not awkwardly phrased. Literature on how to market products abounds with advice about not using the passive (impersonal) voice, avoiding long sentences and the like. The behemoth political organisation of the European Union, the institutions of which employ more than 3,000 language workers (translators, interpreters, terminologists, etc.), has implemented a policy termed ‘Fight the Fog’ in which non-language staff are taught “How to write clearly”. Thus the sentence: ... // 19 ...

“a recommendation was made by the European Parliament that consideration be given by the Member States to a simplification of the award procedure.”
can be shorn of passives and abstracts so that it runs smoothly:

“The European Parliament recommended that the Member States consider simplifying the award procedure.” (Wagner 1997: 7)

The challenge for the European Union is threefold: first to make texts which are comprehensible to other staff, second to make ‘originals’ which are easier to translate than tortuous ‘originals’, and thirdly to make for texts which the public can understand, especially information which is to be passed on to the nearly 380 million citizens in the Union.

Internationalisation

For reasons that will be discussed below, the European Union cannot state that ‘originals’ should be written solely for the express purpose of being easy to translate. However, there are professional language workers who set up precisely such texts. Guidelines for how to write ‘controlled language’ abound on the Internet. But I believe the notion of texts that are easy to translate is more interesting the way it is found in the field of ‘localisation’ which is a newcomer in translational activity. ‘Localisation’ or ‘in-

ternationalisation' is a kind of 'text-cum-translation' work done in industries keen on marketing products internationally and which need to have 'originals' which can be easily transferred from one culture to another. To quote a well-known definition:

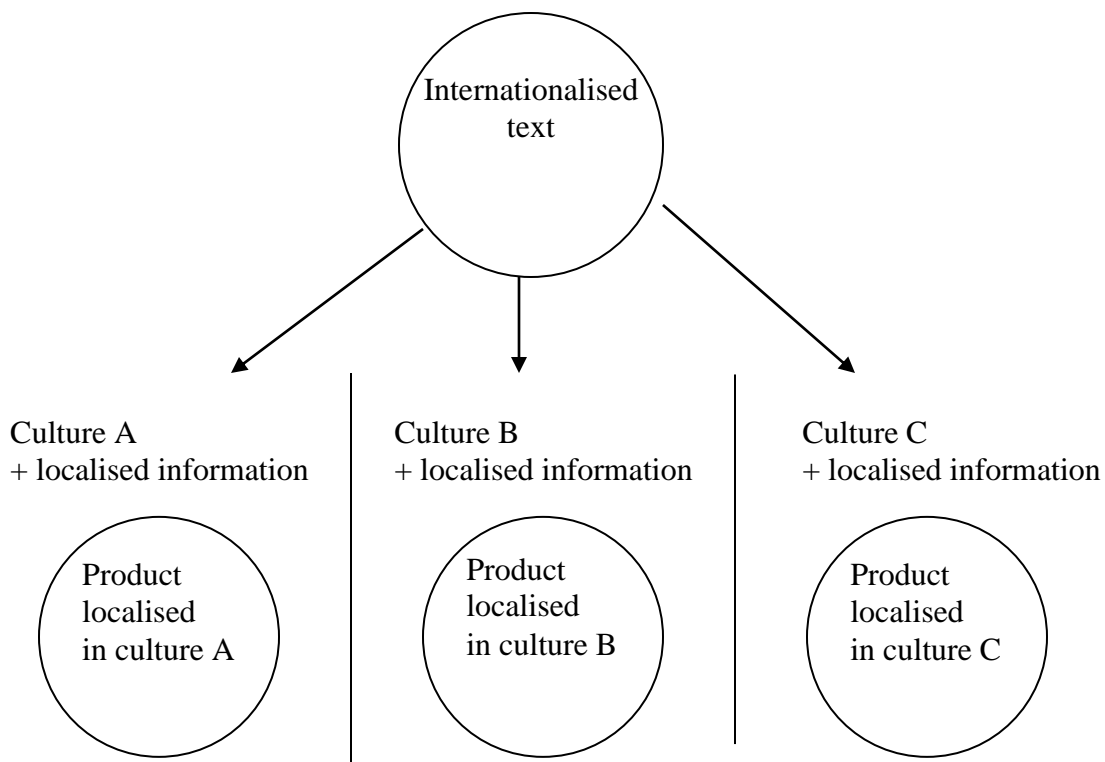
"Internationalization is the process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for re-design. Internationalization takes place at the level of program design and document development." (here quoted from Esselink 2000: 25)

The process relies on such features as 'controlled language' and can be described as 'de-nationalisation' and 'de-culturalisation' with advice such as "Do not use culturally-specific text or jargon, e.g. humor, political references, slang, references to TV shows, national monuments ..." and "Avoid references to seasons, time zones, weather, or holidays, such as Christmas trees or Halloween pumpkins." (from Esselink 2000: 28)

Although the tone of the literature in the field is generally optimistic, it must be stressed that so far 'localisation' seems only to have been successful with the languages of the West, that is, with Indo-European languages. In addition, it is a procedure which is well suited for 'impersonal' texts concerned with tangible and physical objects, such as manuals, instructions for electrical appliances and the like.

We may illustrate the general idea as follows:

Illustration 2: An illustration of 'Localisation'



It is hard in this day and age to know precisely what the implications are for translation outside the field 'localisation' has defined for itself. On the other hand, it would be unwise to disregard this development.

Yet the above examples do not include any cultural texts: it is telling that it is (impersonal) industry and political organisations that can combat poor language with the greatest ease and set up international guidelines for the composition of 'originals'.

Cultural texts

The moment we turn to cultural texts, there is one major divide which we cannot disregard, namely, between (a) texts which have been written poorly, possibly without revision like the example I cited from the Copenhagen tourist brochure and (b) those that have been nurtured and revised carefully. In general, one can count on a novel's style because the author has been keen on making it as good as possible (in order to have it published) and that the publisher will have lavished some care on it in order to get good reviews and enjoy greater sales.

This, of course, is not a rule without exception, so the care devoted to a novel written by an author who has received the Nobel Prize will definitely be greater than that accorded to a cheap romance.

By cultural texts I mean texts which relate to the culture in which they are created. It is my contention that this applies to the vast majority of texts produced in the world. Most of them are not meant for translation at all. Somehow or other, they fall beyond the province of impersonal texts. One could even argue that any national legal text is cultural in so far as it is embedded in a specific culture, but since the profession of 'legal' ('certified', 'sworn', etc.) translator has now been in existence for more than a century in Europe and there are special schools that train legal translators, this particular field will not be discussed.

On the other hand, cultural translation the way I refer to it, is a broad field, spanning from cartoons over subtitling of films and surtitling of operas via liaison interpreting to translation of tourist brochures and literature.

Cultural features

It is not until one digs into a text that one appreciates the extent to which most messages in a language are permeated with culture. Ju (2000: 200) thus exemplifies how, to Chinese readers, the Chinese characters for 'sheep' (绵羊), 'field' (田野) and 'forest' (森林) relate in visual ways to real-world referents in ways which Latin or Cyrillic letters cannot convey when these words are translated into European languages.

In order to present students with realistic assignments in exams, I regularly use tourist brochures. On a ferry plying the waters between Danish islands, I once picked up a brochure about a small island. The text exhibits quite a few problems which are sometimes discussed in Translation Studies, but for which most 'solutions' suggested by prescriptive teaching are woefully inadequate.

The trading route between the mainland and the island of 'Fejø' could be translated as follows:

"Well into the mid1960s most important traffic between the mainland and the island would go via the charming harbour of Dybvig in Østerby." (My translation).

To Danish tourists, the letter of the island's name (\emptyset) signals that we are dealing with an island. It is also eminently obvious that the harbour of 'Dybvig' was favoured since it means 'the deep water inlet'. In addition, Danes instantly place the harbour on the eastern coast of the island because 'Østerby' means the 'eastern town'.

Many translation teachers will come up with ready 'solutions'. ...// 20 ... One is to footnote the text – but, frankly, how many footnoted tourist brochures do we meet with?¹ Another solution would be to explain the place names in parenthesis; this would not only make for clumsy sentences, but might be slightly offensive to the readers because it would imply something like "You ignoramus need to know that ...". Furthermore, it would make the English tourist brochure longer – and thus give Danes the impression that the English brochure imparts information which is withheld from them. In the translation I suggested, I did not attempt to replace the specific Danish 'Ø' with the English 'Oe'. The reason was that I believe people who would read the English translation would be interested in recognising the road signs which are in Danish. At all events, it is clear that no matter how a translator tackles the text, there cannot be any 'equivalence of effect' and hardly one of 'equivalence of meaning'.

A bit further down, the brochure informs readers that

"Fejø's old church was the first one built on the islands." (My translation)

However, the Danish text might equally well be translated as:

"Fejø's ancient church was the first one built on the islands." (My translation).

The 'original' can thus lead to two linguistically equally well-founded translations. However, the first one implies that the island has at least two churches, namely the "old" and the "new" one. The other one states that the island's (only) church is of a venerable age. Having been on the island, I know that there is only one church, and that the latter translation is therefore the one corresponding to reality. But Denmark has nearly 500 islands and no translator can be familiar with all of them. In other words: background knowledge is excellent, but occasionally its acquisition requires superhuman skills. And then a translation may give its audience another impression of reality than the original does because there are subtle differences in connotative and denotative meanings in the two languages.



A brook in the Botanical Garden, Beijing, China

Cultural errors in the original

The vast majority of ‘cultural hurdles’ are either overlooked by translators or left out of translations. Occasionally, translators know better than the original author. Thus, for instance, a film about the Second World War showed American soldiers preparing for a raid on German lines. They wanted to take along a “translator”. The Danish subtitler corrected this into “interpreter” (‘Danish: ‘talk’) without any ado. In another television programme an American doctor was telling spellbound and bedridden children a fairytale about a “king” who believed he was showing off a magnificent dress whereas, in fact, he had no clothes on. The professional Swedish subtitler recognised the story as “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen, and therefore put in the title of “emperor” (‘kejser’). By and large, I believe that such corrections are fairly infrequent because most translators have been taught to trust the authority of the ‘original’.²

The unstable original

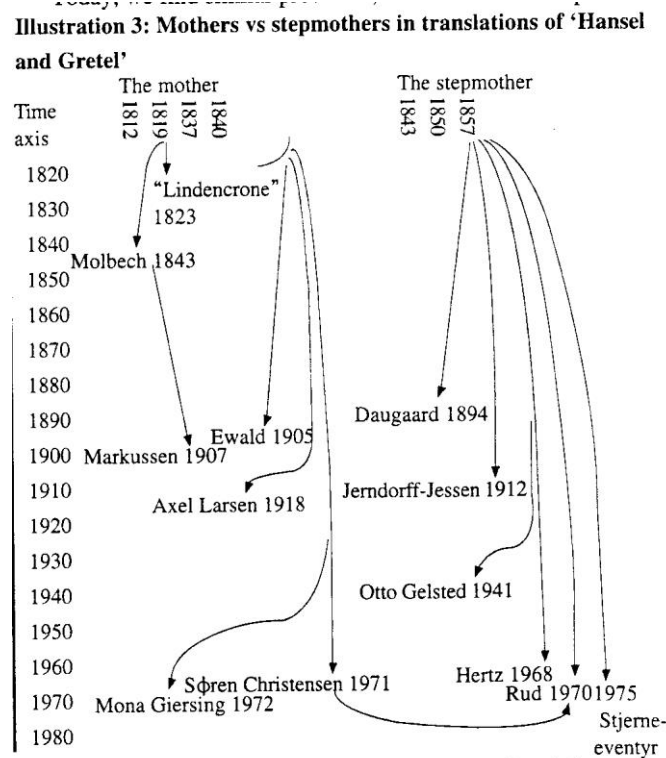
Diachronic instability

Two years after my first visit to ‘Fejø’ (see above), I returned to the island. The tourist brochure had been updated. The text I had previously used no longer ‘existed’. Similarly, the originals of instructions for many utensils in modern homes are updated subtly as models with slight modifications are marketed. This means that the instructions

do not have to be 'retranslated' but that large parts of the previous translation can be re-used, re-cycled, as it were. The point in the present context is that the 'original' is changing under our very eyes.

There are many examples in literature. The German brothers Grimm *Tales* have been translated into Chinese numerous times. The brothers first published the tales in 1812 but then revised them extensively many times up to 1857 (Dollerup 1999: 39-51). In the course of these forty-five years the tales were translated repeatedly into Danish. In the well-known tale of 'Hansel and Gretel' in which a boy and a girl are left in a wood and find a pancake house, it was, until 1840, their own **mother** who abandoned the children, but from then on the German 'original' insisted that she was their **stepmother**. The strength of Danish translations before 1840 meant that for more than one hundred years there have been two competing schools in Danish translations of the story. This can be seen in the graphs in illustration 3 on how translators have been divided over the issue (for further discussion, see Dollerup 1999: 220-236).

Illustration 3: Mothers vs stepmothers in translations of 'Hansel and Gretel'



Today, we find similar processes, but within shorter spans of time: in the West, many international bestsellers are handed over to translators before the authors have completed the books (the 'originals'), in order to make for near-simultaneous publication, notably on the American and the European markets. New material added by the author is forwarded to publishers who are marketing the book in other countries and, occasionally, changes are made so late that the translator does not have time to include them in the published translation.

Cultural (or geographical) instability

In Europe, authors enjoy better copyright protection than in many other countries. In the US, for instance, publishers have house editors who check, edit and even rewrite sections of books in order to ensure good sales.

It also means that American and English 'originals' are not always the same: ... // 21 ...

J.K. Rowling's books about Harry Potter, a boy at a school for wizardry, reflect the British school system when they are marketed in Great Britain, but the books are made to reflect the American school system in the books sold in the US. The title of the first film (2001) shows a similar duality: it is 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' in Europe, but 'Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone' in the US.

In some cases, authors actually do the adaptation themselves: the British author Jeffrey Archer had a novel about political intrigue in the Tory party bought for publication in the US. He preferred to do the re-writing himself. In the process, he changed the number of key political figures from four to three and blurred the identity of the party since the American political system is different from the British.

The point is that the unsuspecting audience is not informed about these differences between British and American editions of the 'same' books. Nor are translators. There may therefore be considerable differences between, say, Chinese translations made from the British and the American editions, respectively. Critical analysis of translations of books from English must therefore also involve a study of the identity of the source text

Original vs source text: relay translation

In many cases in world history, translation has not been direct between the 'original' and the 'target' text, but the 'ultimate text' (the target text) has been made from an intermediary translation, a relay translation.

To mention one major example: the most important book in Christianity, the New Testament, is known by bible translators in its Greek version. Yet the words uttered by Jesus Christ were in Aramaic. In many children's books with pictures produced internationally, the texts may have been realised in many different languages before the purchasers acquire it (Dollerup 1999: 257-276).

China had much early Western literature from Japanese rather than the language of the original (Pollard 1998: 11; also several other contributors).³ Notably small languages such as Danish (spoken by 5.2 million people) and Norwegian (spoken by 4.4 million people) have been rendered into Chinese in relay. The relay languages used most often for the few Danish books have been English and Russian, in one case with a German translation as 'support' (Xu 1998). The Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen has been rendered into Chinese via English relay translation (He 2001). It is difficult to know exactly how much a relay realisation affects the final target text. It is obvious that one cannot generalise from one or even a handful of cases, but we may assume that careful translation may make for a translation which many ultimate target-language readers are satisfied with. In any case, He's conclusion to his study of translations into Chinese based on English translations of Henrik Ibsen is optimistic: "I hope to have shown that relay trans-

lation can sometimes be quite successful and adequately render the source language features in the target language.” (He 2001: 212).

Synchronous publication

So far, my discussion has been based on the relatively simple model of communication shown in illustration 1. It comprises senders, messages and audiences which could be defined, albeit sometimes somewhat fuzzily (the ‘author’ of a manual is likely to be a team of engineers, secretaries, etc). As we have seen, the ‘original’ might sometimes change, but the relevant feature is really that there might be different phrasings in translation which – according to a linguistic analysis – are adequate and equally legitimate.

But the existence of the international organisation termed the European Union has brought forth an interesting phenomenon. The European Union comprises fifteen member states and has eleven official languages. For its day-to-day work, the languages used most frequently are English and French (the ‘core languages’). But reports or laws which are to be legally valid in all the fifteen member states, must be released at precisely the same time in all eleven languages. In practice, there are thus one or two versions of a document (in English and French) for in-house work. These versions are not merely a text, but also a tool, a repository of views and negotiations to which delegates from all fifteen member states have contributed. They are flexible and can be changed in each round of negotiations by suggested emendations and compromises. But when the final debates have taken place in the decision-making bodies, these tools acquire another status: they serve as a source text for the other nine or ten languages. The eleven texts are subject to scrutiny by legal translators to ensure that they ‘are the same’.

The eleven texts are then published and are equally valid and authoritative. The text in the core language which served as a kind of ‘original’ has lost its status as an ‘original’. Unlike other ‘originals’, it cannot be re-translated with alternative phrasings and other words: the eleven texts have the same status. In a simplified way, the process can be illustrated as follows:

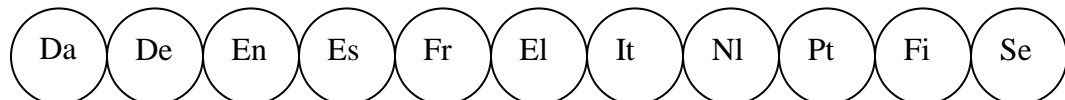
Illustration 4: The core language(s) and legally binding texts in the EU languages

Process:

Core language:

Negotiations,
Translation, interpreting, use of terminology, use of translation memories, etc.
Political decisions

Result:



It is obvious that there have been similar processes long before, notably at the political level, for instance, when common communiqués were published. But the European Union has catapulted this difference between the processes which are familiar to all trans-

lators and the end result which is relevant to politicians and to the nearly 380 million inhabitants of the European Union to the forefront. Translators and Translation Studies scholars should not be led astray by the fact that, when they discuss 'translation' in the European Union, they are discussing a number of isolated processes. This is brought out forcefully by the organigram (illustration 5). This picture – given on the next page – frequently used to illustrate the workings of the European Union.

The illustration is deceptive, because the cells are units of 10 to 25 translators, each of whom will do her translation work. But although the organigram of the European Commission comprises c. 1,300 staff, it does not include the 1,700 other language workers at other European Union institutions. It does not take into account interpreting and it does not take into account the negotiations which concern the **content** of the texts that are or will be translated. Many people who discuss translation conducted at the European Union institutions, fail to realise the complexities of the process which ultimately leads to one final product: 'equally valid and equally authoritative' texts in eleven languages. ...// 22 ...

This is a challenge to traditional Translation Studies. It also spells death to the traditional notion of 'originals'.

Concluding remarks

This article has suggested that in order for Translation Studies to keep up with developments in the field of practical work, the basis must be widened from a narrow discussion of equivalence, however relevant this concept is in the sheltered classroom. The case has been argued by means of an incisive analysis of the status and the existence of 'originals'.

I have described originals which are poor. It has then been pointed out that 'internationalisation' and 'globalisation' make for new views on and concepts of texts in translation contexts. Moving to cultural texts which are embedded in the cultures in which they originate, it is suggested that they often carry a heavier cultural load than translation can accommodate.

I then proceed to a discussion of the instability of originals. There are examples of 'changes in the original' over periods of time as well as in terms of space (notably between the UK and the US). Similarly, it turns out that, historically, there have been many examples of translations which are not direct but made by means of relay. Some of these may be very different from the 'originals' which societies relate them to, whereas others may reflect the 'originals' adequately.

Finally, we turn to the implications of the synchronous appearance of eleven equally valid and authoritative texts which, at the same time, relegates texts which only few days previously served as 'originals' to another status, because, unlike the texts normally discussed in Translation Studies, these texts cannot be made the object of re-translation.

Notes

1. I believe that the use of footnotes is resorted to in particular between languages and cultures which are far apart. Thus it seems that the first translations from English into Danish tended to have footnotes whereas these are rarely met with in modern translations. Similarly, footnotes are found more often in 19th than in 20th century translations. One way out, which is being used in literature, is for the

translator to write a kind of brief introduction on the culture of the source text and possibly to provide the book with an annotated list of concepts and words which are only transliterated.

2. Subtitlers in the Scandinavian countries (which include Denmark and Sweden) are usually wary of 'correcting' factual errors because most viewers will know English, the language of most foreign language programmes and will therefore believe that a subtitler's correction is actually an error. I am thankful to Shirley Pollak for pointing out this to me. The two examples may therefore crop up because in the first case, only language professionals would know the difference (and most of the audience would not notice the difference. In the second programme was for children and the subtitler could take it for granted that (a) that few would know English, and (b) that all would recognise the Andersen tale and would therefore be puzzled by hearing about a 'king' in that context.

3. In Dollerup 2000, I discuss the terminology in more depth. A 'relay' translation is a translation which has been made for an audience in an intermediary language: in other words, the German *Tales* of the brothers Grimm were translated into English in order to be published in England for a British readership. The first Chinese translations were made from English and early English translations therefore served as 'relays' for the Chinese tales. Conversely, re-translation is a new translation of a foreign book which has been available in some form or other in the target language (an example would be the 'translations' of Aesop's fables into Chinese (Chan 1998)). 'Support' translation is when the translator tries to use a third language translation to check on a relay.

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THE NEXT ILLUSTRATION SHOWS THE ORGANOGRAMME OF THE TRANSLATION SERVICE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMISSION AS IT LOOKED ON THE 16 SEPTEMBER 2001 (and cannot therefore be used for uncritical generalisations).

Service de Traduction 16.09.2001

