



*Scenery on the island of Anholt, Denmark: Dunes, fir trees and protective vegetation to preserve the sands*

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## **TACKLING CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TRANSLATION**

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### **Abstract**

This article argues that although ‘the cultural turn’ is a recent buzzword in Translation Studies circles, there has always been cultural communication in translation. This is illustrated by simple sentences that, in translation, are either interpreted differently or clearly convey information about their foreign provenance. Additional light is shed on the complex interplay by a discussion of the ‘literal’ vs. free dichotomy and of the relationship between translators and the texts they translate. These are found to be suffused with culture, and this leads to a brief discussion of ‘literal’ translation and domains where it is appropriate. On the other hand, cultural texts tend to be translated ‘freely’. It is suggested that linguistic and contrastive studies of cultural translation are narrowly tied to the texts that they study and therefore fail to come up with results that are generally appli-

cable. The article therefore proceeds to describe a model which appears to be more suitable for a discussion of the relationship between source and target texts. The model operates with four linguistic layers (a structural, a linguistic, a content, and an intentional one) in addition to a paratextual layer and chronological axis. It is posited that such a model may yield fruitful results. The model is used for describing the translation of a tourist brochure (German-English), a philosophical text (English-Chinese), as well as modern literary translations between Danish and other languages. It is concluded that the model can be used for discussing many features in cultural translation as well as translation work at different levels in source and target texts. It is posited that free translation, including translators' elision of 'culturally incompatible features' is the best option for literary texts, but that even fluent translations will eventually, e.g. as the outcome of language change, be challenged by re-translations.

### **Culture, language, and translation**

It is useful to start by defining culture. A definition stating that a culture is "sets of behaviour, norms, values, and beliefs shared by a community which has a common language and placement in space" will serve in the present context. So cultural communication is communication between two languages used by and referring to the worlds of two different communities with different sets of norms and different types of surrounding worlds.

There are a few points here worthy of note.

The first is that it implies that there are no two communities in the world which are identical. Let us examine this in more detail: if such communities existed, they would logically have the same language. They would be living under similar geographical conditions and looking at sceneries that were identical. They would also have the same religion, values, and norms. They would also have the same family and social systems. They would be at the same stage of development.

We all know that there are no two communities in the world like that. Conversely, we know some communities and nations are more like our own than others. Similarly there are areas, and large ones at that, which are comparable in different cultures. Some features concerning natural phenomena are identical: Black coal is black coal in nearly all languages, and diamonds are pure carbon and can be described in a formula by physicists. We all agree that a functional airplane can fly, and that most birds can as well – except ostriches and emus. But we do not necessarily understand things in precisely the same way. A translation of a simple sentence will illustrate this. You, my reader, may just translate the following sentence into your mother tongue or your first foreign language:

"She walks in the sand and looks at the sea."

Please try to visualise the translated sentence. And then you should look at the questions in the endnotes.<sup>1</sup>

Let us add another example. If you read an article in a Spanish magazine opening with the statement “Jean-Paul had always favoured trekking in the Arctic wilderness,” the name and the place make it improbable that this takes place in Spain and you will, more or less instantaneously, assume that this is either a translation or an international adventure story. The textual signals give away most literary texts and reveal that for all the discussion about ‘free’ vs. ‘close’ translation, there are many pieces of cultural information that tell readers whether a text is a home-grown product or imported from foreign parts.

In communication between cultures we must use different languages and in the transfer between languages we may use different strategies. And no matter what we do and how we go about it, the individual recipient’s response will not be precisely the same in the target culture.

### **‘Literal’ (word-for-word) vs. ‘free’ translation**

One particular strategy which is discussed frequently in most translation histories worldwide is ‘literal’ as opposed to ‘free’ translation. They are not absolute and static entities, but merely stenographic terms for strategies that pay **more** versus **less** respect to the wording of the original, or to put it otherwise, are source oriented vs. target oriented. What is more, *this differentiation is known only to people in the translation business*. Outside the world of translation, people may – in some cases – consider the style of the former “heavy” or “awkward”. But this is it. Cheng Mei (2003: 55) points out that word-for-word translation was the primary strategy for the first generations of Chinese who translated Buddhist writings in the Jin and Eastern Han dynasties (AD 148-316) and she attributes it to poor language skills. In Europe the Roman orator Cicero introduced the dichotomy between “word-for-word” and “sense-for-sense” in translation between Greek and Roman. So behind it, there may be something as simple as ‘foreign-language command’.

Let us, however, use these two strategies rather than any others for a discussion of intercultural challenges in translation.

### **Translators and their texts: yesteryear and today**

But what kind of translations are we dealing with? The traditional model for a discussion of translation applies to a cultural, specifically a literary, text. This model is influenced by literature, notably by European Romantic thinking about translation. In European Romanticism, the poet was a semi-divine being who created a work of art in a moment of inspiration. Well-known descriptions of such moments of inspiration are found in most European literatures such as English poet William Wordsworth’s “Above Tintern Abbey” (1798) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (1797-1798). Coming, as it did, at the moment when translation became one of the forces in the general progress in Europe in the wake of the industrial revolution, the creation of many nation

states, improvements in transport and increased international trade and travel, it had enormous repercussions on our view of translation. This view implies that a translation is a mere shadow of the real thing, a reflection subservient to the authority of the source text, something which cannot reach the sublime heights of the ‘original’.

The model we use for discussing translation on this basis goes as follows:

A sender > a message > a translator > a translation > a target-language audience.

The model’s literary origin is obvious. It is the author who determines the form of the message, it is the inferior or ancillary translator who renders the masterpiece into the target language and the target-language audience that gets an adulterated version of the ‘original’.

In today’s world, it is obvious that the model is flawed. It always was. In the first place, no source-text was ever an ‘original’ until it was the source text for a translational process which led to the production of a translation. The weaknesses are, however, obvious now when literature makes out less than 0.1% of all material translated.

We have all had instructions or manuals for modern appliances in our hands (computers, dryers, washers, and so on). Modern manuals may comprise information or instructions in anything from three up twenty-five languages (my record). It is one or more teams of engineers and technical writers who are the identifiable senders, if any. There is a message (the instruction) but this message applies only to one model of the appliance. The next model will probably have a button added. Of course the whole manual will not be re-written because of this one button. The new button and its function will be described and some sentences will be changed in the language in which the text was first conceived. These sentences are the only ones that are translated into the target languages, that is the languages of the countries to which the appliance is exported. The traditional model of translation with its ‘one’ sender, ‘one’ source text, ‘one’ translator, and ‘one’ target-text’ is far too simplistic for what is happening today.

True, this example was not a cultural text. But exactly the same happens with tourist brochures which, especially when we are talking about large cities or national ones, are based on teamwork. They are definitely cultural texts. And, surely, nothing is more cultural than religion: the bible of the Christians and the sutras of Buddhism are composite works with many authors and not one single identifiable sender. Both religions were spread by means of translations of the source texts.

### **Translation and culture**

At the same time, it is true that many Translation Studies scholars have not been consciously aware of the cultural side of translations. At least the word ‘culture’ and the buzzword ‘the cultural turn’ have not cropped up until fairly recently in Translation Stud-

ies, making some people believe it is something new. This is not correct. Throughout the ages, competent and conscientious translators have always been aware of the cultural side to translation. Bernard Lewis (1999) provides a funny example. In 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the Islamic Empire with its capital in Istanbul established diplomatic ties with England, ruled by Queen Elizabeth, the monarch who saw the ascendancy of the British Empire. The letters between the two sovereigns were exchanged via Italian. The English Queen wrote in English or Latin and, via Italian, this was rendered into Turkish and vice versa. In the Sultan's perception, the Queen of England was just another underling, so he told her "that he was happy to add her to the vassals of his imperial throne, and he hoped that she will "continue to be firm-footed on the path of devotion and fidelity." The translator did not even try to render this in Italian. When English ships were authorised to trade in the Ottoman lands, the Sultan said that the English Queen had "demonstrated her subservience and devotion and declared her service and attachment." This was rendered into Italian and consequently into English as "sincere friendship." This, if anything, is a translation which is adequate between two different cultures and two radically different perceptions of the world. But it is certainly not 'close', and it is not loyal to the sender in that it does not impart the Sultan's view of the Queen of England as a loyal vassal. But, it was definitely adapted culturally to the recipient and it was loyal to the sender by ensuring the continuation of co-operation. A 'close' rendition would have been offensive and might have led to hostilities.

### **'Word-for-word' and its persistence**

Nevertheless, the idea of word-for-word translation is quite persistent even in translation between non Indo-European languages. Perhaps we should ponder why.

In the present-day world, we do meet with word-for-word in professional translation in some specific instances. One such field is in the pharmaceutical industry. Why? It is done in order to make sure that every component in the product is listed. Another area is one well-known to experienced translators but not mentioned in public: you are translating a specialised text and all of sudden you hit upon words, strings of words, and passages which you do not comprehend. What do you do? The only option is to translate them word for word. In my experience, it works in at least 80% of the cases. Why? Because the clients and the audience have the background knowledge that enables them to crack the code.

Let's then turn to word-for-word in the cultural sphere. In foreign language teaching, teachers often ask students about the meaning of one word, perhaps a string of words. Is this in order to get a fluent translation? No, they are doing it in order to make sure the students understand what the text is about. It may also be used in descriptions of foreign languages. Have a look at the following passage which Mildred Larson (1996)

uses for describing something as cultural as the structure of the language of a native Indian tribe in Peru, the Aguaruna.

<i>Makichik</i>	<i>aents</i>	<i>aagsean</i>	<i>ajuntak,</i>	<i>etsa</i>	<i>akagaig</i>	
One	person	fish-hook-obj	throwing in	sun	going-down-ds	
<i>namak</i>	<i>weuwai.</i>	<i>Nunik</i>	<i>etsa</i>	<i>wamak</i>	<i>akaikimtai,</i>	<i>kiimpag</i>
river	he-went.	Doing-so	sun	quickly	went down-ds	getting dark
<i>waketak</i>	<i>kawau</i>	<i>shinutai,</i>	<i>jii</i>	<i>ekeemtuk</i>	<i>diikaa</i>	
returning	frog	croaking-ds	fire	lighting-for himself	trying-to-look-for one	
<i>makichik</i>	<i>kayanmak</i>	<i>kuwau</i>	<i>majamjajai</i>	<i>tsanian</i>	<i>ekeemas</i>	<i>shinu</i>
one	on-a-rock	frog	toad-with	being-together	sitting	one-who-croaks
<i>ekeematman</i>		<i>wainak,</i>	<i>kuwaun</i>	<i>achika</i>	<i>juwak</i>	<i>majamam</i>
on-who-desired-to-sit-obj.		seeing	frog-obj.	after-grabbing	taking	toad-obj.
<i>tiwiki</i>	<i>ajugka</i>			<i>ukuiuwai.</i>		
brushing-off	after-throwing-him-in-the-water			he left him.		

It requires some effort to make sense of the word-for-word translation, but in Mildred Larson's English rendition we find a folk narrative:

Once upon a time there was a man who went down to the river one evening to fish. While he was finishing, the sun went down quickly and it got dark. As he was returning home, he heard a frog croak. So he lit a fire and began looking for the frog. Suddenly he saw a frog and a toad sitting together on a rock singing. Grabbing the frog, he took it with him. However, he brushed the toad into the water and left it. (Larson 1996: 65)

In most other contexts, including learned discussions, I believe that the persistence of the idea of word-for-word translation ties up with foreign-language teaching: most translators have, at some stage or other, been pupils and this is why they take word-for-word translation seriously and consider it worthy of attention.

### **Tackling and analysing cultural translation**

Let us now address texts which we automatically associate with culture, namely literary texts and admit that we are interested in these texts because they are more varied

and present challenges to translators, because they introduce us to human lives different from those we know, and because they introduce us to other cultures.

Overall, I believe that this is the area in which translations will be ‘free’. This poses a major problem for much translation criticism because scholars tend to apply contrastive linguistic and philological approaches which, in the first place, yield little useful and new information that applies beyond the specific translation(s) discussed, and, secondly, also shuts out large areas of the cultural dimensions.

Once we accept that cultural translation will normally call for ‘free’ translation which is dynamic, we need other approaches (a) for describing how linguistic and cultural features are transferred between languages and cultures and (b) for describing how the features of source and target texts relate to another, in order to make for more fruitful and useful findings.

In a study of the translations of the German fairytales of the brothers Grimm into Danish over a period of 170 years, I set up a model for discussing originals and translations in a way which, as one reviewer pointed out, offers “nonjudgmental criteria for [the] assessment of the ‘adequacy’ of a translation which avoid such conflicted notions as ‘fidelity’ to the source text, or censorship operating in the receptor culture.” (Seago 2001: 120). This is the model which I shall present for the analysis of cultural communication in translation.

### *The textual layers*

The model is simple and operates with four layers in texts which, despite some overlapping, allow for cogent discussions:

- the structural layer (the textual order of elements, passages, and episodes),
- the linguistic layer (including words, word order, phrases, repetitions of words, sounds, assonance, euphony, and 'style'),
- the content layer (‘facts’, and points and elements in the structural and linguistic layers which can serve for interpretation), and
- the intentional layer.

The content layer, relating to points or segments in texts, generally allows for interpretation in the sense of a text-internal, consistent meta-understanding of specific texts; the intentional layer will usually allow for an external meta-understanding of the text as related to human experience (ranging from morals to universal transitions in life). (Dollerup 1999: 47)

### *The para-textual layer*

To these four layers we must add a para-textual layer, such as pictures – this is what we meet with in illustrated books, in films and drama. They may affect translations

if the translators use these pictures to emphasise or deviate from the source text (Houllind 2001). It may lead to a shortening of the rendition, etc.

To this we may add other combinations, such as numerous ‘relay translations’ that lead to different target text realisations in different countries. (Dollerup 2000) Or the intervention of publishers and editors. (Bush 1997)

### *The chronological axis*

Finally, it is clear that there is also a chronological axis. From a fairly high number of cases that have come to my attention over the years, it seems that at some stage or other, many established target cultures ‘feel a (cultural) need’ to have new translations of classics from other cultures. When so, there are problems with changes in time and perception.

## **Analysis**

### *An Austrian tourist brochure in English*

We may start out with an example of a tourist leaflet for a small hotel in Vienna, Austria, which Mary Snell-Hornby (1992) quotes and comments on in another fashion. It is from a fashionable, quiet, and discreet place appealing to a wealthy clientele.

Das unvergleichbare Flair von Wien zu geniessen.  
 In einer der schönsten Pensionen dieser Stadt.  
 In unmittelbarer Nähe von Universität, Rathaus, Parlament, Burgtheater und Votivkirche.  
 Sich wie zuhause fühlen. Lift. Behagliche Zimmer.  
 Selbstverständlich mit Dusche, WC und Telefon.

The first professional translation went:

To enjoy Vienna’s unique atmosphere.  
 In one of the city’s finest guesthouses.  
 University, City Hall, Parliament, Burgtheater and Votivkirche in the immediate vicinity.  
 To feel at home. Elevator. Comfortable rooms.  
 Naturally with shower, WC, and telephone.

The structural layer has been preserved, only in line 1 the verb has been moved to the front and in line 3 the prepositional construction has been moved to the end. Both shifts are in keeping with English usage for these syntactical units, but, despite this, the translation does not sound like ‘ordinary’ English syntax.



At the linguistic level, we notice that the individual words are rendered by (lexical) equivalents. There is a striking feature: the punctuation – which is usually not discussed in Translation Studies – in the translation follows that of the source text including the fact that there is no comma between the “Burgtheater” and “Votivkirche”. It is, then, a kind of point-for-point rendition which is, I believe, much more common in translation than is usually realised. At all events, the linguistic layer is largely the same except for the ‘style’. English linguistic usage calls for expansion of the utterances often verbs as is evident in Mary Snell-Hornby’s suggestion for this and the following line:

“A few minute’s walk from the University, City Hall, Parliament, Burgtheater and Votivkirche. Here you can relax and feel at home”. Without attention to style, to sounding fluent in the target language, the translation is staccato, awkward, and not a good advertisement.

But what about the content layer, the facts, points and elements in the structural layers that serve for an interpretation? In line 2 we meet with the word “guesthouse” which, as Mary Snell-Hornby points out, is humbler in England than the “Pensionen” of the German cultural sphere. This directs the hotel leaflet towards a less well-heeled audience.

The intentional layer is not the same. It is not a comfortable place that informs us about the amenities and the surrounding sights in an out-of-breath manner. It is not a place for feeling at home. Mary Snell-Hornby suggests something warmer for the opening lines: “Come and enjoy the unique atmosphere of Vienna – and stay in one of the city’s finest Pensionen.” It is immediately noticed that she has also changed the orthography in the sentences.

At the para-textual level, this leaflet must have had pictures which means that to the target-language audience, there must have been a disparity between what they saw and what they read. Mary Snell-Hornby mentions another para-textual factor: the manager of the hotel was not quite happy with the translation so he asked her to “correct the language mistakes”, which resulted in a complete rewriting of the tourist leaflet.

The text is modern so there is no problem with the chronological axis.

I have not commented on the “Burgtheater” and the “Votivkirche”, the reason being that these have been retained as they will appear on a map, in the same way that you will find “The Tower” and “Parliament” on maps of London. There is a problem in other contexts, but notably in connection with tourism and geography, you may transcribe, transliterate, or calque your way out in translation.

### **Thomas Huxley in Chinese**

We may have another look at a cultural translation, this time of a philosophical work, namely Thomas Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* (1898). The book was translated

into Chinese by the celebrated Chinese translator Fu Yan (1901) as part of the effort to make the Chinese intelligentsia aware of modern Western thinking.

The original goes:

It may be safely assumed that, two thousands years ago, before Caesar set foot in Southern Britain, the whole country-side visible from the windows of the room in which I write, was in what is called “the state of nature.” Except, it may be, by raising a few sepulchral mounds, such as those which still, here and there, break the flowing contours of the Downs, man’s hands had made no mark upon it; and the thin veil of vegetation which overspread the broad-backed heights and the shelving sides of the combs was unaffected by his industry. (Huxley 1901: 1)

Fu Yan’s translation sounds as follows:

赫胥黎独处一室之中，在英伦之南，背山而面野。槛外诸境，  
历历如在几下。乃悬想二千年前，当罗马大将恺彻未到此时，此间有何景物。  
计惟有天造草昧，人工未施，其借征人境者，不过几处荒坟，散见坡陀起伏间。  
而灌木丛林，蒙茸山麓，未经删治如今日者，则无疑也。

A back-translation sounds:

Huxley sat alone in his study, which was situated in southern England. In front of the house was a stretch of land and behind it a mountain. The whole countryside was visible in a natural state from the window. Huxley just could not help thinking about what it was like two thousand years ago when Caesar, the Roman general, had not yet set foot on the land. Unlike today, it must have been a land of burial mounds, a thin veil of vegetation spreading across the broad-backed heights and the shelving sides of the ancient combs.

In his discussion of this translation, Luo Xuanmin (2002) posits that Fu Yan made Huxley more elegant and acceptable to Chinese readers. This is a point which I shall not dispute. But I shall compare the English original with the back-translation.

At the structural layer there are many differences. The main one concerns the introduction of a new opening, but from then on, the Chinese translation is more terse than the English source text. The activities of man, mentioned twice in English, are referred to only indirectly in Chinese.

At the linguistic layer, there is nothing special.

Conversely, there are considerable deviations at the content layer. There is a cultural feature that is explained by means of explicitation, namely that Caesar was a Roman

general. The range of low hills called the ‘Downs’ have become a mountain in Chinese, but then Fu Yan never saw England and may have been misled by a dictionary. There is a noteworthy difference concerning the burial mounds. In English there were only “a few sepulchral mounds” among the vegetation before Caesar’s arrival, whereas there are an abundance in the Chinese translation. The opening presenting Huxley makes sense because it introduces Huxley and his background to Chinese readers.

When we turn to the intentional level, this passage is subsumed to the message of the book and since Luo claims that “the spirit of the book is there”, we must assume that the intentional layer makes it to Chinese.

There is also a sleight-of-hand at the para-textual level in that the opening that takes care to present Huxley as an Englishman and not a Chinese. Fu Yan makes it clear to Chinese readers that they do not have to identify with the English author.

### **Cultural communication and authors**

In the last discussion there was no reference to the author at all. Thomas Huxley is unlikely to have known Chinese or to have known the contents of his book in Chinese.

Nevertheless, there are authors who are greatly concerned with a precise rendition of their works in translation, in intercultural communication. In such cases we are dealing with of a combination of all layers. Whenever the German author Günter Grass publishes a new book, he has his German publisher invite all translators to a session, at which he expounds on his ideas and explains everything he believes they may find obscure. Similarly, the Italian author Umberto Eco sees to it that all translators of his books receive a commentary that runs into many pages to make for adequate translations.

Some translators are also scrupulous. Thus, for instance, it is customary for Danish literary translators to write authors and ask for clarification of ambiguities and the like.

Histories may be even more complicated. In 1995, a Danish author, Peter Høeg wrote a book in Danish called *Miss Smilla’s Sense of Snow*. Taking place mostly in Greenland, it mirrored the Greenlandic language which, for instance, has many words for snow. This book was translated into American. Realising that this translation might serve for relay translations into other languages, the author checked the translation and found something like several thousand ‘errors’. He wrote the translator who accepted about half of his suggestions. Angered, Peter Høeg and an Englishman then corrected the American translation for publication in Great Britain. Høeg asked the American translator to have her name appear on the book, but, disgusted, she refused to do. Accordingly, the English translation is ascribed to a non-existent person.

Let us have a close look at this case. The translator did not change the structural layer.

At the linguistic layer she changed “meters” into “feet”, “centimeters” into “inches”. She did not convey all the niceties of the arctic scenery, all the different types of snow in Greenland. Most people will say: how right the author was in finding faults! My query is: really? Why do I say so. I do so because Greenland is part of Denmark and Danes are accustomed to seeing news and films about Greenland – Denmark is actually the country in the world with the highest awareness of what it is like to be in the arctic region. But Americans do not watch all that many films about Alaska and the translator clearly adapted her translation to that American cultural reality.

Finally, there may have been a para-textual level: in the US books are published in order to make money. Therefore all American publishing houses have house editors who correct all books so as to read fluently in order to make for better sales. Accordingly, it may well have been house editors who were much more aware of sales figures who dropped all the linguistic niceties.

It was the author who disregarded the fact that translation is indeed cultural communication.

### **The chronological axis**

The present discussion has not touched the chronological axis at all. The reason should be obvious: the activity of translation is so suffused with individual judgment that one should be cautious about coming up with rules.

But many of the features about the past in our own societies, are - like things from foreign cultures - archaic, outdated, and forgotten.

What do translators do? When one studies old translations and moves up to modern times, there seems to be a kind of chronological development (with some overlapping to be sure) in the ways translators cope:

1. the first translations from another culture are adaptations, rewritings, hardly translations at all in the modern sense. Then, through a number of stages that would still be termed ‘free’,

2. we get footnotes concerning specific features at the content layer,

3. explanatory parentheses, then we find

4. the explicitation, that is explanation that is made part of the text to make for fluent reading – as in Fu Yan’s example with “Cesar, the Roman general” - and finally,

5. a mere transcription, as in the example I provided with Mary Snell-Hornby’s “Burgtheater und Votivkirche”. If she had written it for a non-European audience, she would probably have had to explain the terms “Burgtheater und Votivkirche”.

6. Prefaces or postscripts explaining the foreign setting of a book are of another ilk because they are para-textual – it is the publisher who accepts that such material is included.

### Translators and cultural communication

In the three last stages listed above, translators are aware of their audience's specific background knowledge. For translators who are aware of the importance of cultural communication must be conscious, if not fully cognizant, of what their audiences want to know.

A colleague of mine translated a Chinese book which describes life in a Chinese village. She knew that her urbanised Danish readers have little idea of Chinese villages and therefore included a description of life in rural China. Fu Yan knew that his readers would have little idea of England, whereas Mary Snell-Hornby expected her "Pension" to be a place which would appeal to Europeans.

Or it may be that translators target their translations differently. A couple of years ago, there were – after a prolonged lull without translations – suddenly two new translations of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote* in Denmark. One of them was a traditional, philological translation (Iben Hasselbach 2000), whereas the other one had a long and detailed commentary explaining the cultural background of 'el siglo del oro' to Danish readers (Rigmor Kappel Smidt 1998-1999)..

I'll draw to my end on what may seem a controversial note. The first time I came to China, I found Chinese teachers of translation who taught students "omission". I soon realised that this strategy was applied to communist sayings and propaganda verbiage wrapped around the real message. Had this happened in a Western country, many people would have said 'censorship'. I disagree: In modern Danish translations of the fairytales of the brothers Grimm, translators cut out all references to sentimentality and religion. Exactly the same is happening with the translations into other languages of the Danish fairytale writer Hans Christian Andersen. The tales he penned in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were sentimental and religious. Now these fairytales have moved along a chronological axis that has made both sentimentality and an overdose of religion hopelessly outdated and this also goes for the translations. Competent translators quietly obliterate and elide whatever features they know are unacceptable to their audiences because these features are, as I have termed them, "culturally incompatible" with target-culture values (Dollerup 1999: 248-251).

But let me stress that – according to my model - these deletions in translation concern only the content layer, not the intentional layer which is after all the main purpose of a translation which communicates between cultures.

### Conclusion

I have discussed how translators function in cultural communication at many layers in texts, in para-textual contexts as well as along a chronological axis. What counts in the major perspective in translation is that there is a successful creation of a text which, in

the eyes of the recipients, convincingly conveys what they consider the meaning of the source text. In the best cases, the senders may agree.

Can we adduce more from this lesson? My belief is yes: When you analyse text in translation in this way, it is possible to discuss source texts and their translations in more detail, at higher levels, and to reach more interesting, fruitful, and far-reaching conclusions.

In terms of actual translation work, the application of this type of differentiation enables us to argue that at the structural and at the linguistic level we can make a translation run as fluently as if it were originally written in the target language. But the content and intentional layers will still reveal to the audience that this is something from another culture, something which is cultural communication.

It is a question how much foreign culture a target audience wants to understand, and how the audience wants to hear about that foreign culture. If the audience is willing to be presented with both the content and intentionality of the source text there is a high degree of cultural communication. But the communication between author and audience in the source culture is definitely a far cry from the communication between the translator and his or her audience in the target culture because there are other factors in the target-culture communication which were not present in the source-text culture communication, such as novelty and foreignness.

The individual translation lives a perilous life as things change in the target-language culture. There may be changes at the linguistic level because of language change. They may occur at the content level because certain values, such as nationalism, political ideology, and so on become less important to the target-language audience. At such stages there will be people who start challenging the ‘old’ translation. They argue that it sounds old-fashioned, that it is incorrect, that it is out of tune with modern perceptions. This calls for a new translation, a re-translation adjusting the target-text at all the layers I have discussed in order to renew and strengthen the cultural communication between the source and the target culture.

### **Notes**

1. The questions for your translation of “She walks in the sand and looks at the beach.”

Is the ‘she’ alone? In many countries, a woman will rarely walk alone. Readers in such countries will therefore visualise several women.

What is the colour of the sand? Is it finely grained or coarse? Is it even or uneven?

What is the colour of the sea? Is it a freshwater sea or a salt sea?

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