



Flowering tree in the garden of the Summer Palace, Beijing, China

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The actual cases are only relevant in historical contexts, but the principles discussed are interesting.

CONTROL OF TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: DENMARK AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Every day numerous messages are mediated between languages and cultures by means of translations, interpreting, summaries, etc. In addition to being important linguistic and social acts, all messages mediated by linguistic middlemen also become communication in a cross-cultural framework. Accordingly, we might justifiably expect extensive use of some kind of 'control' of the 'correctness' of translations, interlingually mediated messages.

The study investigates and describes the types of 'control' - in the widest sense of the word - of interlingual mediation which are undertaken by senders, by mediators, and by receptors. It is concluded that apart from the EC translation services, such 'control' is usually sporadic and confined to special cases in the major social framework of international and cross-cultural communication.

In practice, 'control' is the exception rather than the rule. Therefore the most efficient 'control' society can undertake vis-à-vis the individual mediator is found at the final exams for future practitioners (translation and interpreting schools).

Interlingual mediation or transmission (such as translation, interpreting, and summary) is a social act in a cross-cultural framework. In all cases, somebody considers the messages worth mediation. In some language communities the sheer mass of such messages may constitute one of the major forces of language change (Dollerup 1983; Lund 1982: 52-68; Sajavaara et al. 1978). As an important social and linguistic activity, we might logically expect most interlingual mediation to be subjected to control or monitoring.

The present study is a systematic examination of 'control' of interlingual messages the way it is exerted in Denmark, and its purpose is primarily to describe the state of affairs. Denmark is convenient as a case study for several reasons: ... // 170 ...

1. It is a fairly small country with approximately 5.1 million inhabitants, and it is easy to get in touch with people in key positions!
2. There is much interlingual transmission into Danish; and
3. There is a fairly high awareness of foreign influence: foreign language teaching starts in the fifth year at school; approximately forty percent of the population goes abroad more than five days a year; and the country handles a disproportionate one percent of all foreign trade in the world.

The last two points mean that many people recognize the existence of problems in linguistic mediation, and in general, expect a correspondingly high standard in interlingual mediation: Danes are more likely to note errors in linguistic mediation than people in societies with less foreign contact.

In this article, *control* is defined as any attempt to have a close look at an interlingual message before, during, or after the mediation or transmission itself. Control may range from a cursory, accidental check to an in-depth scrutiny. It may be informal, or formally institutionalized. It also differs from medium, or 'channel', to medium (for example, subtitling of films must be controlled in accordance with other criteria - and often with different methods - than written translation). Control is undertaken to ensure that a specific transmission is acceptable or is improved. It is always conscious and deliberate. It may be a control of the decoding of the source language; a check that the message is essentially the 'same' in two languages (*content control*); or an assessment of the 'style' of the message in the target language (*stylistic control*).

The last type is based on assumptions of what native speakers of a language accept as authentic, indigenous messages, and as fluency and accuracy in speech and in writing. Yet, it is very important, for it is our only - and fuzzy - criterion for discussing whether mediated languages have been well integrated in the target language or not.

Our point of departure will be a modified model of communication: in the source-language context, a sender formulates a message which, for some reason, is selected for interlingual transmission. Accordingly, the message is mediated, and it may undergo *internal control* as a part of this mediation process. The mediation may be followed by *external control* - the word 'external' denoting that monitoring takes place after the transmission; it is undertaken by people who know the target language but are not the ultimate receptors. ... // 171 ...

The major components in this process are shown in Figure 1, in which we indicate: (a) the points where the source-language sender and the target-language receptor respectively may potentially exert

control; (b) a message; and (c) the existence of ‘controllers’ both for internal and external assessment/control, and modification.

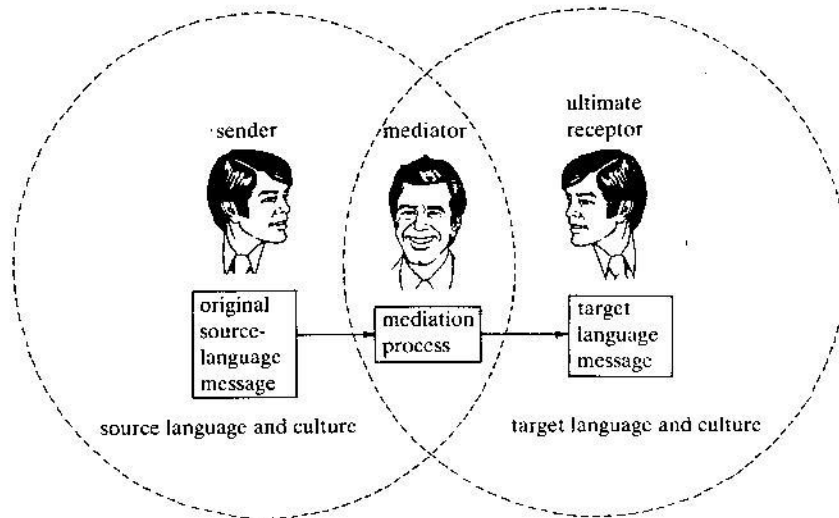


Figure 1. *Essential components of an interlingual mediation.*

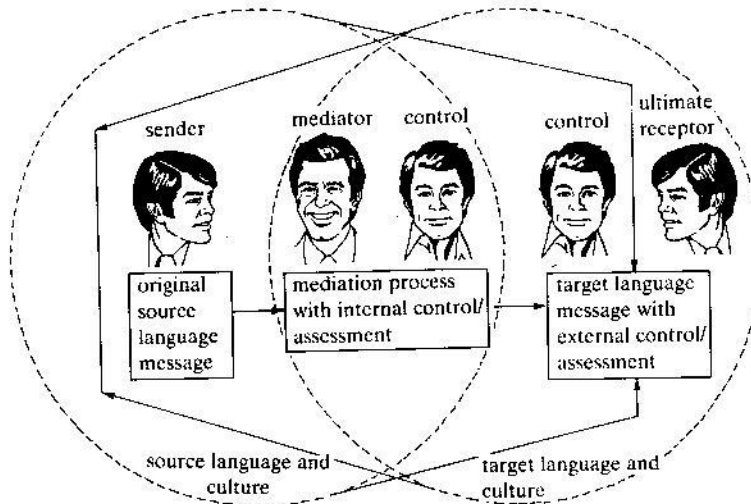


Figure 2. *Components of the system of control in interlingual mediation (arrows indicate the most extreme limits of control in either direction).*

Figure 2 is best exemplified by tracing an ideal interlingual mediation from beginning to end: an English bestseller destined for the international market by its author is bought by a Danish publishing house. ...// 172 ... It is handed over to a reputed translator; the translation is then scrupulously revised by the house editor whose knowledge of English and mastery of Danish is undisputed – a ‘mediation process with internal control’. The book is published in Denmark. On the day of publication, reviews appear in all newspapers; all reviewers comment on the quality of the translation which they, too, have checked (‘external control’); and satisfied that everything is all right, the Danish reading public flock to

buy the book. However, this ideal is far from reality.

In the following discussion of what happens in reality, we shall try to distinguish between the three main components in the interlingual transmission: we focus first on control exerted by the sender, then control of the mediation process and eventually on receptor control, although the three inevitably overlap.

Sender control exerted by the sender

In principle, even a sender ignorant of the target language imposes some restriction on mediators and transmitted messages. Thus the deontology of translation requires that transmitted messages should be as faithful to the originals as possible. In practice, this restriction is often weak.

The *droit moral* applies to the works of both dead and living authors. It is accepted internationally by the Berne convention (1948) and nationally it was protected by Danish law, supervised by a committee under the Ministry of Education (Lund 1961: 91-94).

An abundance of shortened reprints of classics bears witness to the ineffectuality of the law, and it came as no surprise when, in 1985, the supervisory committee was quietly dissolved.

Disregarding the classics, it is often assumed that there is some sort of control. In a standard Danish translation contract one of the stipulations (point 4) is that ‘The Publisher agrees to publish the said work in a complete and faithful translation . . .’ Despite its deceptive precision, the phrasing is vague as to what is controlled. This comes to light when it is compared to the demands (in section 2) of similar contracts with the Copyright Agency of the USSR: ...// 173 ...

The Publisher shall guarantee the translation and publication of the Work in strict accordance with the original submitted by the Russian Copyright Agency and shall have no right without the Agency’s preliminary written consent thereto to make any amendments, abbreviations or additions in the Work to be published, to change the author’s name, to include in the Work any additional material in the form of prefaces, postwords, comments, etc. The publisher shall submit to the Agency before the publication the Danish title of the Work for approval.



The Russian Copyright Agency is explicitly entitled to check a translation: as the sender's representative, it can exert what I previously termed *internal* transmission control, for the contract goes on: 'If the Agency specially asks for it, a copy of the translation should be sent before the publication of the book. In this case the Agency shall consider the translation within X number of days'.

In some cases we meet with personal sender control. Thanks to 'gentle pressure' the German author Günter Grass had his German publishing house insert a stipulation in translation contracts of *Der Butt* (*The Flounder*) that translators should attend a meeting with him. The session took place in 1978 at Frankfurt, and on that occasion translators from Denmark, Finland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden discussed translation problems with Günter Grass and were given literary and cultural information for their work (Øhrgaard 1978).²

In this interesting case the focus was on the decoding in the source language, and therefore it is no real guarantee that the message makes it to the ultimate receptor.

In Denmark, sender control is usually vicarious. Typically, some authors or their executors have 'outsiders' check on translations by established Danish translators.

In principle, it is fine to have internal control before messages reach the ultimate receptors. In practice, control of this type is seldom of any use, since non-Danish authors and literary agents are rarely in a position to find 'revisers' who are competent enough to 'revise' the work of experienced translators,

because they do not know the Danish market.

Small Danish firms use partial and personal sender control in their international dealings: since the managing directors are often most proficient in foreign languages, they must often ‘determine the actual phrasing in letters which ought to have been handled at the secretarial level’ (Sibani 1983: 17). Such control varies and it is therefore impossible to generalise: at one extreme, managers’ command of the target language is perfect, at the other one they will probably frequently substitute correct phrases with wrong ones. ...// 174 ...

Complete and personal control by a sender presupposes that the sender can check the message after mediation into the target language. Some Danish authors have checked translations of their works, perhaps even helped the translators. For instance Klaus Rifbjerg did so when his *Anna, I Anna* was translated into English (*Scandinavia Today* 1982: 7).

A kind of modified sender control is routinely used by Danish delegations to the EC when they speak Danish at meetings, for example, because they are aware of their linguistic shortcomings. When the Danes make an important speech, a delegate checks whether the message gets through correctly by listening to one of the receiving languages. This is shown in Figure 3.

If there is an error in interpreting, the Danish delegate who is listening to the interpreting on a par with the ultimate receptors, will inform the Danish delegation, the ‘sender’, about it. The contents of the message will then be repeated, so that the previous transmission is nullified. The main purpose is to keep the erroneous transmission out of the minutes, the permanent record of the meeting.³

The transmission process

Most interlingual mediation is undertaken by nonprofessionals, for example, tourists abroad, and journalists writing about foreign affairs, interviewing foreigners, or casually referring to things foreign. There is usually no control of interlingual and cross-cultural mediation in such messages, because the media, the channels, are shifting and changing.

In well-defined media, however, with professionals, such as subtitlers, interpreters, and translators, there are some constraints, defined as external or internal forces which affect the mediation process itself and will - or ought to - leave their imprint on the target-language message (see Dollerup 1986).

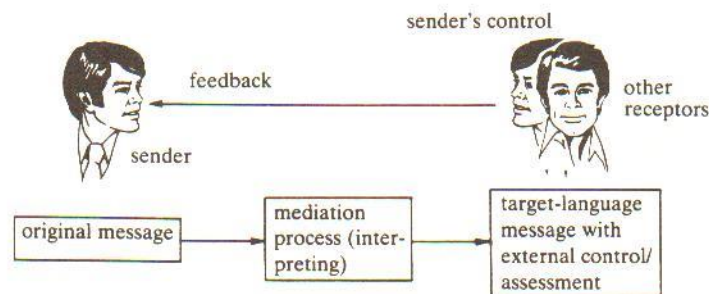


Figure 3. *Sender control of ultimate message.*

... // 175...

External constraints

In the first place professionals must pay homage in word if not in deed to the principle of fidelity to the original, to the sender and the *droit moral*. And, secondly, their work is often public, and open to scrutiny.

The most thankless task is *subtitling*. It is patently difficult to shorten and simultaneously to be faithful to the original by the standards of written translation, the yardstick of many viewers. And since many of the ultimate receptors in Denmark can check on subtitling at the linguistic and pictorial levels, there may be divergent views about the felicity of subtitlers' efforts. Since more than 40 percent of all television programs and 75 percent of all films are of foreign provenance and therefore subtitled (synchronization is used only in films and programs for children), subtitling is highly visible in Denmark.

Interpreters must operate under their deontology which - although it differs a little according to country and organization - stresses that they should be as nonpartisan as possible (for example, the AIIC Code; Kulick 1982: 134). In addition, interpreters work in environments with considerable social interaction where senders and ultimate receptors can see one another and change roles, and the outcome of the talks may be important to all concerned. There is thus an 'environmental', largely nonlinguistic control (see also Buhler 1985).

Translators are constrained before mediation by the standard contract between the Danish Authors' Guild and the Danish Publishers' Association: 'The translator guarantees that in terms of contents and style, the translation is an adequate expression of the original, and that there are no excisions or changes which have not been preciously authorised by the publishing house'. And there are numerous other factors that circumscribe translation, for example, previous translations, quotations, limitations of genres, and the target audience's expectations.

Immediate transmission

Apart from these constraints, I do not believe there is any assessable control in the mediation process. Surely we all agree that a good transmission demands that the mediator (a) has a thorough knowledge of both source- and target-language culture and language; (b) is familiar with a large number of different disciplines, fields, and human activities; (c) has common sense,⁴ ...// 176 ... (d) is in tune with the message to be transmitted; (e) strives to understand all statements in their contexts; (f) is consciously aware of things which must obviously be checked and has a hunch, or flair, for identifying others which need to be checked; (g) and is conscientious so that problems are solved as well as possible instead of skipped.⁵ However, this is not control, but part of the trade of interlingual and cross-cultural mediation.

Internal control directed by the transmitter. Transmitters may personally subject parts of the message to control before it reaches the ultimate receptor (see, for example, Nida 1964: 245-251). It undoubtedly varies with transmitters; more often than not it is unsystematic, and to a high degree it must depend on individual linguistic awareness.

The most immediate and obvious tools for control of decoding in the source language and its culture are dictionaries, encyclopedias, native speakers, etcetera. More mediate methods of control are comparisons between the source-language and target-language messages; checks on previous translations, if any, or letting work on the translation rest provided time permits.⁶

In some cases the mediators may turn to senders for control. In consecutive interpreting, interpreters can check messages with senders before they are interpreted into the target language. At the EU, translators can sometimes call the original senders to check on the special passages.

Translators working with fiction can turn to the authors. When he translated Mary McCarthy's *The Group* (1963) the Danish critic Hans Hertel asked her about problems of style, narrative technique, and historical background. Her answer, 'Letter to a translator', was later published as an essay in English and French (McCarthy 1964, 1965).

Mediators may also control the target-language expression: in a booth simultaneous interpreters may ask their colleagues to check on whether the interpreting is correct, thus deliberately calling on some control and assistance. And there are also some translators who can consult outside experts. This is, for instance, the case at the translation services of the EU.

Some translators are wary of experts:

in dire straits one can make a call to an expert ... I once translated a book on psychoanalysis and ... feared attacks for erroneous terminology. Therefore I had the publishing house make one of the leading experts in the country check the book ... The book was reviewed in a... newspaper, and the translator was soundly castigated because of five examples which were all due to the expert's corrections. (Boisen 1982: 10-11)

...// 177 ...Internal control supervised or directed by transmitters merges with internal control by another person when the translator asks some linguistically trained friend to check and criticize a translation (for example, Øhrgaard 1984); or when we have to do with cooperation in linguistic mediation.

Internal control independent of transmitters. Control independent of the transmitter before the message reaches the ultimate receptors ranges from the accidental glance to systematic scrutiny.

Given the time pressure that is part and parcel of *journalistic work*, interlingual and cross-cultural mediation in articles is rarely checked before publication. This is amply evidenced by the poor Danish in news from abroad, no matter whether it is translated or written by Danish foreign correspondents. Errors, especially those that make for self-contradiction or contain obvious false friends, may occasionally be corrected by a colleague, an editor, or, most likely, a proof-reader before being printed.'

There is no official policy of controlling *subtitling* internally on Danish State Television. Nevertheless, the subtitles in the news, which are usually made under time pressure, contain fewer errors than other televised subtitling. The reason is that journalists in charge of a particular bit of news see it before it is aired and therefore indirectly 'control' subtitling in 'their' news, a situation which is shown in Figure 4. The figure illustrates the interlingual message as part of another, larger message; as such it is

checked inside the mediation process.

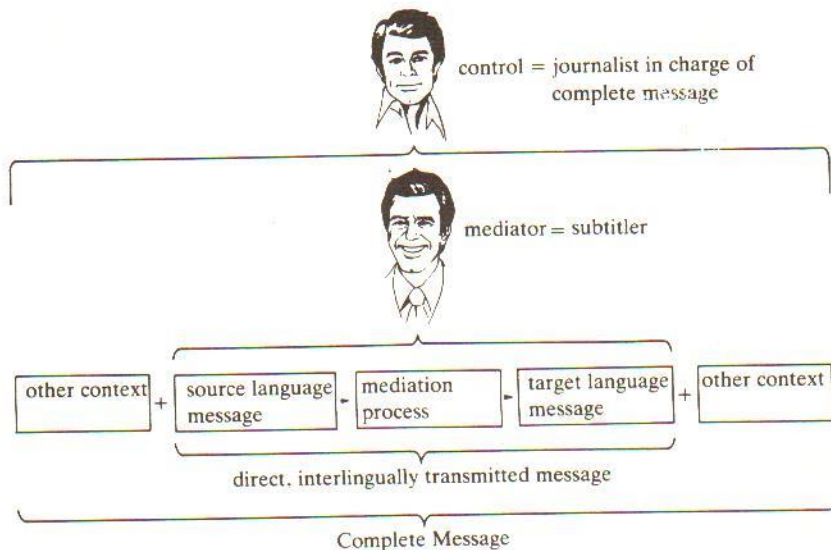


Figure 4. *Internal control because of context (television news).*

... they listen to interpreters who understand A but

The accidental character of internal control is further illustrated by an example of control in video distribution: the firm which dominated the Danish market at the beginning of the 1980s happened to hire a highly experienced subtitler with a fine linguistic background as the final editor of the subtitling procedure for a nine-month period in 1985. During that period he corrected errors systematically.

Zoëga (1984: 42-43) has argued that control of *interpreting* may take place among colleagues. There is no doubt that interpreters will assess one another in the same way that all professionals evaluate colleagues. Control meant for improvement can, however, usually only take place before the message reaches the ultimate receptor, and, therefore, professional assessment (beyond exams) is outside the scope of our discussion. Even if interpreters in a booth catch errors in one another's mediation, this does not affect the message that reaches the receptors. At multilingual meetings there may be control in a roundabout way when some interpreters are not familiar with a specific language, say language A. ... // 178 ... When language A is spoken, they will therefore use 'relay', that is, they listen to interpreters who understand A but whose target languages we can call B and C. The control comes about as follows: An interpreter ignorant of language A and who mediates into language D may now find the quality of one relay poor (for example, transmission from A into language B) and accordingly switch to C. The interpreter who has exerted this type of control will, of course, stick to the better relay of B and C. Figure 5 shows the procedure.

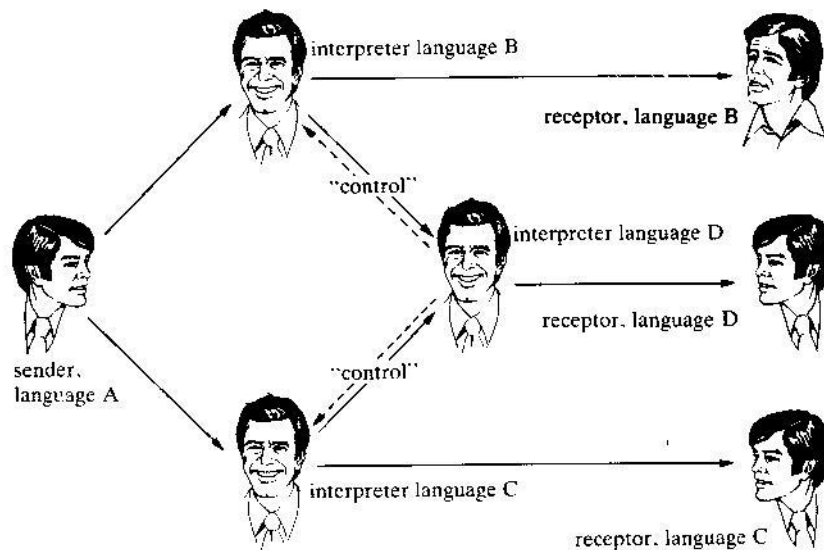


Figure 5. 'Control' by means of relay in interpreting.

Although such control does not improve the performance of the interpreter in the B-booth, it still means that the ultimate receptors in language D get the best message under the circumstances.

In *translation* even Danish State institutions accept what can, at best, be termed 'casual control': the Foreign Ministry rarely controls interlingually mediated messages, except when there is some doubt about their correctness (content control) or the language is exotic. The absence of systematic control is due largely to the existence of a special language school for ministry personnel.

In the publishing world, almost 1200 works of fiction and 500 of nonfiction are translated every year (out of a total of 2000 and 5000 books respectively). ...// 179 ... According to the standard contract between translators and publishers previously cited, the publishing house 'reserves the right to check the translation and make minor corrections, if necessary' (section 9). In practice, the procedure changes from book to book, translator to translator, and publishing house to publishing house. Therefore we only know that at one extreme, translations are 'revised' against the original; at the other, there is no control of the translation, not even a rereading by the translator.

The EU translation service is the only place with systematic control of linguistic mediation which is ideal (cf. Nida 1964: 247-251). There is an immediate internal control, a 'revision' after the first translation. Principles of correction may vary between departments, but it focuses on content rather than on style: the material is directives, legislation and the like, which, as Reiss points out, calls for 'grammar translation' as this '*wird in der Praxis grundsätzlich bei der Übersetzung von Urkunden verlangt*' (1983: 199).

There is more to the EU system. Provided it functions smoothly, receptor control may be an integral part of the linguistic mediation. The receptors in question are not the ultimate receptors (the average community citizens), but they are delegates from the member countries. These delegates can affect the transmitted message: many papers in the community languages are internal working documents which may be changed; and - in principle - all changes lead to new translations in all EU languages. In this

process, delegates can report errors to 'their' translators before a document reaches its final form. ...// 180 ... In this way, delegates 'control' transmitted messages, making them understandable to all target-language receptors.

At all events, there is one important stage where internal mediation control is very strong indeed: when interlingual mediators pass exams or are hired by a new employer. In these cases, their work will normally be checked. The trust placed in linguistic middlemen is justified only because it is generally assumed that such checks have been undertaken as a matter of course.

Receptor control

Receptor control takes place after the event. In a social cross-cultural framework its only effect is that we may surmise that it contributes to weeding out inept transmitters. Apart from that it is inefficient. It is limited to a few areas. It is usually unsystematic. It is most frequent as anecdotes or the topic of informal conversation and, therefore, the most visible type of control.

Control may vary with political and social events: in the years immediately after Denmark entered the EU in 1973 there was, for instance, some discussion in the news media about the translations and occasionally even the interpreting services at the Communities. As things have settled, the discussion, if any, is muted.

One type of transmission which is subject to ongoing, tangible, external assessment is *subtitling on television*. Many people think it is riddled with errors: 30 percent of 152 Danish viewers who were interviewed about the use of subtitles thought they had found at least one error in the subtitles of the last Anglo/American program they had been watching; yet detailed questioning revealed that the viewers did not take into account the fact that subtitles must be shorter than the original (Neesby-Hansen 1983: 34-38). Nationwide there will be one (usually negative) reference to subtitling a week, for instance as a letter to the editor, a comment in one of the dailies' television reviews, or as a small note - surely not an impressive feedback.

Another place with external assessment - or control - is in *reviews of translated books*. Translators complain that there is too little feedback:

In view of the mass of foreign literature appearing in Danish, I simply cannot comprehend why some critics and other mediators still believe that translations are not worth evaluating. Whether they are good or no good. This is the reason why the craft of translation is without the criticism found in all other art forms. (Brunse 1984: 125) ...// 181 ...

This allegation is correct. Over a four-month period in 1984, I checked on the reviewers' comments on translations in two newspapers. Less than ten percent of the book reviewers remarked on the translations, and even so two thirds were different versions of the following statements: 'Very well written and well translated' and 'Christian Koch has translated the book with a fine feeling for its special humor'. Most factual comments discussed one particular phrase or word - for instance, two reviewers took up the question of the proper translation (vs. retention) of the same Greenlandic word in two dif-

ferent books; and the following comment from the review of a 432-page book is typical: ‘The translation is up to Mr. Boisen’s usual high standard, except for one chapter where he forgets that the English word ”would” may imply repeated action instead of will’ (*Politiken* 14 April 1984). In the four-month period under review there was one example of high praise. This is for making a book readable: a popular science book on heart diseases is understandable ‘even to non-specialists. The author James J. Lynch and his Danish translator Hanne Danielsen have taken great care to ensure that everyone can understand the message’ (*Politiken* 16 June 1984). And there was one scathing comment on excisions: ‘It is a pity the Danish translation has been cut by about 10 per cent of the original text, including the more intellectual passages’ (*Politiken* 30 June 1984)⁸

For more incisive treatments of translations in reviews I have had to go back in my files. In the review of a German book, a reviewer noted,

In the book, otherwise beautifully translated by Ms. NN, a few passages demand a cultural background which Danish readers may not always have: e.g., what does it mean ‘to sit like the town musicians of Bremen’ [followed by the reviewer’s suggestion] and why are girls addressing one another by their surnames. (*Politiken* 22 July 1976)

The control we meet with here is stylistic control, which is illustrated in Figure 6.

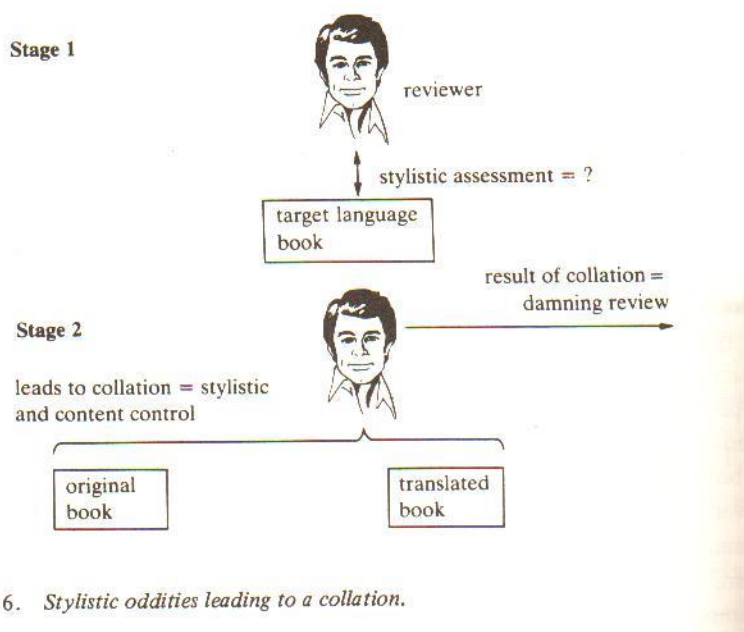


Figure 6. Stylistic oddities leading to a collation.

The reviewer uses her knowledge of German, and then discusses some stylistic features that stand out in Danish: here, the reviewer relies on her general knowledge of the target culture and language for assessing the book in terms of style.

In another case, the reviewer’s suspicions were aroused by similar linguistic oddities; she got hold of the original to compare it with the translation - a process which took several months; this allowed her to discuss the translation in depth in her review. ... // 182 ... Whereas the literal translation of ‘they did not fit very well into any particular pigeonhole’, would have been noted by any reader as pidgin if not

Greek, in Danish, readers would hardly have suspected that ‘a house from the late seventeenth century’ was ‘a late eighteenth century home’ in the original. This was brought out only by comparing the translation with the original. Figure 6 shows external assessment involving a check of the original. The practical problems in getting hold of the original book meant that the review appeared long after the date of publication, so it hardly stopped readers from buying it. Nevertheless, the review ends: ‘I am inclined to think that the publisher should recall the book in order to have it revised’ (*Berlingske Tidende*, 19 November 1980; confirmed by the reviewer, Ms. Winge).



Vladimir Nabokov

In one case, a reviewer’s careful checking of a translation actually led to a recall: the point to note was that the reviewer, Hans Hertel, had immediate access to the book in question, Vladimir Nabokov’s *The Gift* (English version 1963). On the very day the Danish translation appeared (11 January 1966), he published a damning review: ‘The ”Danish” translation is so distorted that one can only review - and refer to - the English edition’. Returning to the ‘translation’ at the end of his review, Hertel continued, ‘almost everywhere where this - admittedly tasking - text demanded imagination and energy, the translators have closed their eyes and skipped the passage They have forgotten paragraphs, whole pages, indeed, up to 6-7 pages (in an arbitrary manner)’. ...// 183 ... And he ended on a sinister note by referring to a Nabokov bibliography which lists two Swedish editions of *Lolita*; they were recalled and burnt in 1957 because of distorted translation. The reviewer therefore suggested that the Danish publishing house recall the edition before a similar fate overtook this translation.

The headline, ‘Mutilated Masterpiece’, was subtitled ‘Vladimir Nabokov’s poetic and witty novel about Russian emigrants in Berlin in a distorted Danish translation which should be withdrawn at once’. The review was quoted extensively in the press. One journalist contacted Nabokov and told him about the review:

Nabokov: ‘... Thanks for telling me, for it is a great pity when things like that happen ... I’ll do something about it, you bet, and it’ll be something drastic.’

Niels Ufer [The Danish journalist]: ‘Does that mean that you will demand a withdrawal of the book?’

‘Yes, if too many passages have been cut.’

‘Chapter four has been cut by 36 per cent.’

‘My God, how awful.’ (*Information* 15-16 January 1966)

A few hours later the publishing house contacted Nabokov and decided to recall the book, and citing Nabokov’s ignorance of the cuts as the reason. (Sources: personal communication with Hans Hertel; *Aktuelt*, *Information*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Ekstrabladet*, *Politiken* January 1966.) The episode is illustrated in Figure 7 which gives an external assessment based on a check between the original and the translation; the original sender is informed about the result, and exerts sender control, so that the medi-

ated message is suppressed:

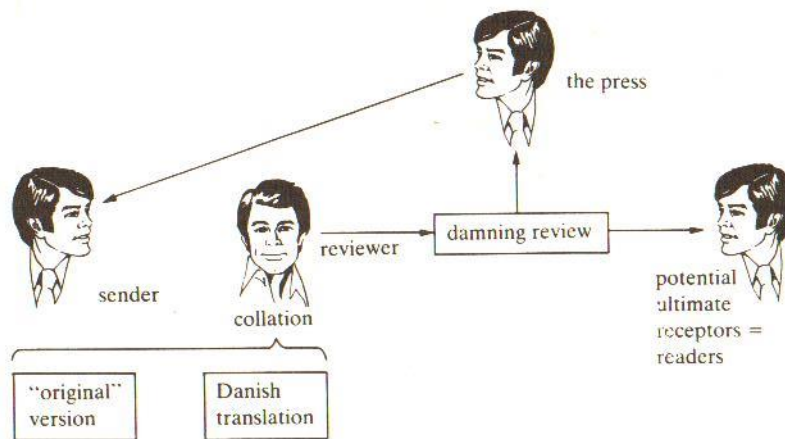


Figure 7. Model illustrating the effect of a damning review on the day of publication.

The case is unique in the annals of Danish translation, a fact recognized at the time. However, it would not have been possible except for a set of special circumstances: (1) the reviewer had immediate access to the original and could therefore check the translation right away; (2) only two reviews appeared on the day of publication - the other review was based exclusively on stylistic control and termed the translation 'excellent'; accordingly, Hertel's criticism received maximum coverage in the media; (3) the critic was a wellknown translator so his criticisms had to be taken seriously; (4) the publishing house had not checked the translation in depth and had not notified Nabokov of the cuts; (5) the author was told about the cuts by an outsider; ... // 184 ... (6) the author was known for his strong views on translation, and for having had books suppressed.

Given these facts, the outcome seems inevitable - on hindsight. Undoubtedly, it would have been different if the cuts had been discovered several months later.

In general, then, few reviewers care about the quality of translations. Those who do will normally only note whether the translation runs smoothly in Danish, that is, they notice stylistic peculiarities and content inconsistencies. In older literature, reviewers may check specific passages if they have access to the originals, at home, at work, or at a library. In any case, critics who also work as translators comment on translations most consistently.

Despite my detailed comments external assessment of translations of literature is, as mentioned, not a matter of course. To put it in its proper perspective: more than twenty percent of the foreign books discussed in Danish newspapers are reviewed when published in their original language. Incidentally, reviewers of such foreign books are sometimes heavily influenced by the language of the original. In one grotesque example, many Danish readers must have been baffled by two reviews - in two different newspapers - of the same American book: one reviewer spoke about the book as 'James Clavell's exotic brick' which uses 'a large canvas'; and the other critic did not bother to translate 'thugs', 'nasty', 'funny', etcetera. (This case of what is termed transfer translation, *afsmiitningsoversættelse*, is discussed

by Messell 1984.) ...// 185 ...

In terms of bulk, book reviews are rather insignificant. Out of approximately 150 newspaper pages checked over one week, reviews of foreign and translated books took up two pages each, a total of four pages. Conversely, there were thirty pages with articles on foreign affairs. They ranged from brief, translated items from news agencies to in-depth analyses by Danish journalists, who were sometimes influenced by the source language.

There are probably other cases of external assessments, although they are undoubtedly unsystematic and rarely noted. In a way, this is a pity, as they may shed additional light on the complexity of interlingual and cross-cultural mediation, people's knowledge of its intricacy, and the ensuing awareness of the need for some kind of control somewhere, be it with the receptor, the mediator, or the sender.

This is illustrated by the following description by a nonlinguist, an attorney, who has realized some of the problems in interlingual mediation and their implications for his work:

When one has witnessed interpreting in English, German, or French in court sometimes and taken note of the difficulties ... one must conclude that questioning by means of interpreting is very tasking for the questioner. The questions must be brief, direct and unambiguous and the whole process of questioning must be well prepared. The usual chatty . . . improvisation covering the main issues ..., is completely destructive, partly because, oddly enough, muddled and imprecise questions provoke answers of the same poor quality, partly because this type of questioning takes unreasonably long and leaves the court in some confusion, not only about the evidence but even about quite basic facts as to what the persons questioned really said and what they meant by it. (translated from Zoëga 1984: 58)

The work in court is illustrated in Figure 8:

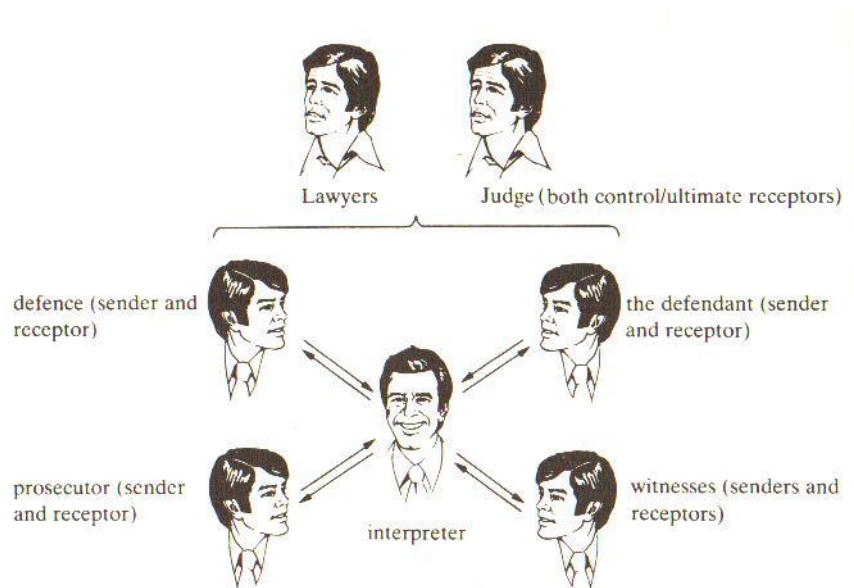


Figure 8. *Proceedings in a law court with interlingual mediator.*

This involves virtually all components in interlingual mediation as well as the social interaction. In his analysis, the attorney takes the outcome as his point of departure. Having then considered the holistic sociolinguistic act, he concludes that the ground rules of his work are changed and that he - as well as others - must act differently as senders in order to receive better.

Concluding remarks

In the present context, we have disregarded studies of specific interlingual mediations since they do not represent any real *control* of messages and their correctness.⁹ ...// 186 ...

The following features stand out in this study.

- Most mediation between languages and cultures, including that of professionals, is not controlled at all.
- There are few places with systematic control in the tangle of interlingual and cross-cultural mediation.
- Systematic checks of translations and originals is found at the EC, and sparingly elsewhere.
- In most cases 'control' is only an assessment, where attention focuses primarily on the content and its comprehensibility; linguistic elegance is touched upon only in literature, a traditional area for people interested in 'quality', and, we may add, with many people with a linguistic background. -In some form or other control may nevertheless be found -if only occasionally - in the interlingual and cross-cultural communication model given in Figure 2. The haphazard and erratic way in which it operates means that we cannot set up a hierarchy or taxonomy.
- The most important control consists of checking inexperienced interpreters, subtitlers, and translators. After an initial check, however, the confidence placed on transmitters is high, nearly unlimited.

It is unrealistic to believe that all interlingual messages could be controlled. No institution has the resources in terms of manpower, competence and an apparatus of production to attain this ideal. ... // 187 ... In many cases an interlingual message is not even worth controlling. In purely practical and social terms mediators will also resent having their 'Danish' corrected. And even if we controlled only institutionalized interlingual messages, there is a problem with our yardstick for 'correctness': spoken Danish is influenced by other languages. In other words, Danish is affected by an uncontrolled inundation of foreign languages and poorly mediated messages.

There is a steady influx of direct loans, of calques and of false friends that gradually come to be true friends because new errors in mediation reinforce previous ones. The norms for 'correct Danish' are weakened and it becomes increasingly difficult to insist on what translators should strive to do in order to 'write Danish correctly'.

At the beginning, I stated that Denmark and the Danish language served as a case study. The size of the country ensures an adequate coverage. As a case study it illustrates an ongoing, universal process in which all languages in the modern world are affected by others, directly, or by means of interlingually mediated messages. Therefore, I hope this study will also contribute to heighten the awareness of some factors behind the processes of language change, and of the criteria that we wish to apply to 'correct translations'.

'Control' differs from nation to nation, for instance, in the interest taken in other countries, in the

amount of interlingually mediated messages in the culture, and in the ways that people exert control ranging from the powers that be to well-meaning, but not necessarily competent individuals. And yet I believe that Denmark is fairly typical of the state of affairs.

Concerning control of linguistic and cross-cultural messages, one conclusion is simple: there are few who guard the custodians. Therefore we - and societies - should not underestimate the importance of the training and education of those to whom we entrust the important linguistic cross-cultural social acts of interlingual mediation.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Niels Barfoed, Christa Block, Niels Brunse, Hanne Danielsen, Lena Flugler, Bente Gammelgaard, Christian Geleff, Hans Hertel, Inge Lise Jensen, James Jensen, Anders Jerichow, Frederik G. Jungersen, Ebbe Kjestrup, Knud Marstrand, Finn Messell, Eva Nøegaard, John W. Zenth, Per Øhrgaard, for assistance, references, and information. I wish to thank Vladimir Ivir, Peter Newmark and especially Albrecht Neubert for valuable criticism. ... // 188 ...
2. The German translators' guild arranges '*Esslinger Gespräche*' on specific authors, but Günter Grass's initiative is fairly unique. At the end of the Günter Grass session the translators concluded that 'such meetings are beneficial for improving the standards of literary translation and for calling attention to the translator's work'.
3. Most Danish delegations that use this procedure at the EU will check on the English booth. However, it is often the French booth version that is taped for the minutes. At other international meetings minutes may be made from any booth - at least there are no special rules. If delegations from a country make national minutes, they normally use a tape-recording from their own language booth.
4. The problem is well known (see, for example, Güttinger 1963: 107) and complicated. In the Danish material, Øhrgaard (1984) mentions that an author may purposely give 'wrong' information, in order to make a point. Conversely, Boisen (1982) refers to thrillers and complains that some authors do poor research or forget what they wrote some pages previously, so that a translator must change the book if he wants to avoid serious criticism: 'Accordingly one must correct it ... no matter whether ... a plane performs contrary to physical and aero-dynamic laws ... or a *bon vivant* orders the wrong wine for the food or mistakes a brand of champagne for one of brandy' (1982: 12). Boisen is right in emphasizing that the problem is peripheral to translation as a discipline. But of course it is central to translation as a profession.
5. Not a popular topic, I have found it in translations that I have checked with the originals. Boisen admits to having omitted a sentence which he did not understand (1982: 8), and Kulick tells of an interpreter who skipped statements of which she did not get the drift (1982: 140-143).
6. The possibility of correcting a translated book in new editions is mentioned by Nida (1964: 251). It is also part of the standard contract between Danish publishing houses and translators (section 9).
7. Editors and journalists interviewed denied having ever checked, let alone corrected, a translation - ex-

cept (implicitly) in one case, where an editor was checking on a newly hired translator. At one newspaper, some of the linguistically competent proof-readers would correct obvious content errors.

8. During the period I checked, there was a spectacular rise in the number of comments on the translations in one of the two newspapers. I contacted the newspaper and found that they had appointed a new director of reviews. Since he was interested in the quality of translation, he had enjoined reviewers to comment on the translations. Qualitatively the comments remained at the level cited; some reviewers tackled the new request by inserting a standard phrase about the fine translation, whereas others quietly forgot it. Nevertheless, the figures given in the article hold good for the national newspapers as a whole. Anyway, by the end of 1986, the editor in question got another post.
9. There are two systematic studies of subtitling: Dollerup (1974), and Neesbye-Hansen (1983). Systematic studies of specific translations are typically theses (for instance, Frøsig 1971; Gerhard 1956). ...// 189 ...

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