Performatives as a key to modes of translational discourse

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am searching for elements of what might eventually either constitute a grammar of translational discourse or demonstrate the impossibility of such a grammar. In the context of this work-in-progress I propose to investigate the linguistic distinction between performative and constative utterances in translation, particularly with respect to the distinction between instrumental and documental modes of translating. But first I should explain why these distinctions are worth investigating.

The troubled relations between linguistics and translation studies

Although most linguists approach translation as a comparison of two texts, few translators see their work that way and few translations are actually received that way. To be sure, any translator must interpret the linguistic structures of the source text, but that is not what they are paid for. Their real linguistic work is the production of a specifically translational text for a new reader and a new situation. Similarly, the reception of a translation certainly involves the interpretation of linguistic structures, but it also concerns the reception of a text that is somehow specifically translational. Linguists who merely compare texts rarely appreciate these two aspects of properly translational phenomena. They can see the input and the output, but not the projection of an active link between the two. Linguistics is thus mostly a study of textual results but not of translational phenomena.

Because of these differences, the role of linguistics in translation studies has been steadily edged towards aspects of terminology and machine translation, largely abandoning the study of actual translational practice to non-linguistic empirical approaches and pseudo-philosophical re-naming programs. At the same time, the statistical turn in machine-translation research risks leaving linguistics stranded between two worlds, no longer adequate to translation as a specific phenomenon and at the same time uneconomical in the field of computational text processing. This would be a sad fate for what was once, in the age of structuralism, the most prestigious discipline in the social sciences.

One branch of linguistics that should overcome this progressive isolation is research into discourses, broadly understood as ways of using language in specific situations, with particular emphasis on the pragmatic role of subjectivity and deictics. But when we look at the supposedly translational research carried out in this field - most prominently in Hatim and Mason's *Discourse and the Translator* -, we find that the discourses concerned are exclusively those of source and target texts that are supposed to conform to some kind of necessary matching. They are not those of the translator, nor of translational reception. This traditional focus has effectively been liquidated by mostly non-linguistic descriptive approaches that are now unable or unwilling to define

translation in terms of any necessary correspondence between two texts. For Toury, corpora of translations should be constituted not according to any linguistic definition but as series including "any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such" (1985: 20). So much for linguistic definitions of translation! However, if Toury's apparent relativism is to be made workable, we would have to know something general about how a text is presented or regarded as a translation. Linguistics may yet have something to say on this level of generality.

In response to this problem I have elsewhere argued that discourse analysis should be pertinent to translation only to the extent that translating itself can be considered a discursive act leading to specifically translational texts (Pym 1991). This means that translations should be considered as a discourse genre over and above whatever linguistic constraints and obligations might ensue from the discursive nature of the source texts involved (Levy similarly argued for translation as a "literary genre"). Properly translational discourse analysis should thus find its starting point in target texts as translations. In a further paper (1992a) I have suggested that the limits of properly translational discourse are not entirely subject to the relativism of "whatever can be regarded as such" but can instead be defined in terms of certain constraints on the use of macrostructural persons, particularly the translator's inability to be expressed in the first person (the utterance "I am translating" is necessarily false while the translator is translating). My concern in the present paper is to move from the discursive analysis of limits to the analysis of different modes of translation. In this way, I would hope to make linguistics focus on both the limits and modes of certain texts and certain discursive work.

A first-person theory of performatives in translation

My initial observation is that the statement "I am translating" cannot be true while the translator is translating. That is, the person who says "I" cannot be the actual producer of the discourse. This paradox suggests that the translating translator can occupy no first-person pronoun and is thus excluded from the whole pronominal system. The impossibility of a wholly translational first person might thus constitute the first rule of a grammar of translation. Unfortunately, the fact that all natural languages have personal pronouns (Benveniste 1966: 261) also suggests that properly translational discourse is not like a language. And if translating translators have no language, we should not expect them to have a grammar like those of natural languages. Hence the need to admit the possibility that any search for a grammar of translation could be limited to just a few negative rules concerning not what must be done in translational discourse under certain conditions, but what cannot be done under any conditions. If this is so, the grammar would only be of the limits of translation. Rather than describe relations that are possible under certain conditions, it would concern relations that are impossible under all conditions, with the negation of these latter relations then aspiring to the status of necessity. This would be a weak grammar but nevertheless a useful result, especially when many non-linguistic approaches explicitly refuse to define these limits.

The paradox "I am translating" points towards the special importance of the present-tense first person to translational discourse. This is of interest because Austin's original description of performatives (1955) similarly underlines the peculiar importance of the first person. No great intelligence is required to see that a performative like "I declare X" can only function in the present-tense first person, since all other persons and all other tenses will give constative results. But does this then

mean that translational discourse, deprived of the first person, is also deprived of all performatives?

Let me restate this question a little more formally.

First, I should perhaps make it clear that I am talking about translations as discursive acts and not as merely well-formed utterances. Assorted pairs like:

- 1a. Please do not talk to me while I'm driving.
- 1b. Défense de parler au conducteur.

may be useful for anyone taking taxis in New York and Paris - or for any linguist interested in comparative discursive conventions (I found the phrases in Guillemin-Flescher 1986) - but have little to do with the necessary directionality of translation. The fact that 1a uses first and second persons whereas 1b uses third persons is of no consequence in situations where it is impossible to tell which is the source and which is the target. Where should one locate the translator in these utterances? What evidence is there of properly translational discourse?

A second example might take us a little further. We are at the opening of a conference and the chairperson declares:

2a. I declare the meeting open.

Half a second later this is "simultaneously" translated as:

2b. Je déclare ouverte la réunion.

Here we find that although both utterances are well-formed performatives, only the chairperson's statement (2a) can properly perform. The interpreter's version (2b) will necessarily have a constative function with respect to the utterance that actually opened the meeting. In fact, its discursive value could easily be rewritten as third-person reported speech:

2c. Le Président vient de déclarer ouverte la réunion.

Thus, a properly translational relationship between two performative forms seems to imply that only one of those forms, the non-translational one, can actually perform. The second utterance, which arrives just a half-second too late, has its function blocked by the presence of an anterior first person, visible to all receivers of the translation. That is, the communication scene is already occupied by a first person with full capacity to perform. Chairpeople can open conferences; interpreters cannot. Or more generally, translational discourse seems by definition to exclude the possibility of a fully performative discursive function. And inversely, a translation that has a fully performative discursive function might then no longer be properly translational.

A formal way of investigating these phenomena is to use our basic distinctions to generate potential correlations and then to ask if each correlation is possible or necessary (this approach uses the above concerns about grammar to adapt Toury's distinction between possible, existing and required translational relationships, see 1980: 63-65). The table of potential correlations would then be as follows:

Source text	Target text

A	Performative	Constative
В	Constative	Constative
С	Constative	Performative
D	Performative	Performative

Correlation A should be taken to be demonstrably possible (on the basis of the above example). Correlation B also seems demonstrably possible, although its status as a necessary correlation demands research that goes beyond my concerns here. Similarly, correlation C would seem to be impossible but requires more work before we can say this is necessarily so. My specific problem is then correlation D, the possibility that a source-text performative can correlate with a target-text performative. If this correlation is found to be impossible, then correlation A will be not only possible but also necessary. Alternatively, if B is found to be possible, then A will be possible but not necessary.

We can now write correlation D as a working hypothesis concerning possibility (since we already know the correlation is not necessary): When a source text is has a performative function, the target text can be both performative in discursive function and properly translational.

As a problem of limits, the testing of this hypothesis becomes most interesting with respect to examples like the following, which I take from Annie Brisset (for similar examples see Bassnett-McGuire 1980: 56-57; Pym 1992b: 199).

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Macduff is reacting to the news that his estate has been destroyed and his wife and children massacred:

3a. I cannot but remember such things were,
That were most precious to me. Did heaven look on,
And would not take their part!

The utterance "I cannot but remember" should be seen as functionally equivalent to the performative "I remember", since the dramatic speech is in fact the act of remembrance. But if we can accept this as a performative discursive function, the same should surely be said of its Québécois translation by Michel Garneau:

3b. C'que j'ava's d'plus précieux dans l'monde, chu t'obligé d'commencer A m'en souv'nir. Comment c'est que l'bon dieu peut laisser fére Des affe'res pareilles? Sans prendre la part des faibles?

As Brisset points out, the phrase "A m'en souv'nir" in 3b is peculiarly performative not just because of the dramatic situation - which could still involve a Québécois actor constating the grief of a Scottish Macduff -, but because the translation involves a constant semantic shift to associate the situation of Scotland with that of Québec (seen in the rendering of the neutral "their part" as "la part des faibles"). This target-text performative function also depends on the translation being performed within the specific social context of Québec: "The wording of this resolution echoes the declaration Je me souviens ("I remember") which is such a prominent feature of Québécois social discourse (it is on every vehicle's license plate)." (Brisset 1991:126). The translational phrase "à m'en souv'nir" calls up a powerful contextual phrase that

enables a functionally performative "I remember" to be performed not just by the actor but also by a specific audience receiving this translation.

The possibility of such a translational performative would seem to affirm our working hypothesis and thus discount the hypothetically necessary status of the correlation between source-text performatives and target-text constatives. A and D would thus both be possible but not necessary.

However, further questions should be raised as to whether reception of the Québécois Macbeth is properly translational at this point. One could argue that since the content remembered through the target-text performative (Québec) is quite distinct from that of the source-text performative (Macduff's family), the translated text should lose translational status for as long as the receiver has forgotten about the specific context of Shakespeare's play. On the other hand, there is no a priori reason to discount the possibility of a double reception process in which a Scottish family and Québec could be simultaneously present through the discursive functioning of a translational performative. But there is an important condition here. Such a double reception is only possible in the specific social context of Québec, number plates and all, where circumstances allow the second person to participate in the performative (that is, to recognise it as a performative and to accord the speaker authority to perform it). If the translation were received, say, in France, absence of this particularly participative receptive context would imply a merely observational second person and thus effective annulment of the translational performative.

I have elsewhere regarded such examples as borderline cases illustrating one of the context-dependent but formalizable frontiers of translation (1992b: 51, 199). This would restore a major degree of necessity to correlation A. For my present concerns, however, it is of some interest to accept the possibility (although not the necessity) of at least partly translational performatives. This possibility may be written into our working hypothesis in the following way: When a source text is has a performative function, the target text can be both at least partly performative in discursive function and properly translational iff reception conditions allow the second person of the translational discourse to be participative.

This extension of the hypothesis may prove to be merely tautological, since it is possible that all performatives require a participative second person (can a chairperson open a meeting without a quorum able to turn mere observers into participants?). But the extension is at least strategically significant in that it moves our investigation from the analysis of first persons to that of second persons. In so doing, it also implicitly shifts our focus from the question of limits to the question of different modes of translation, since we must now deal with the distinction between participative and observational second persons.

A second-person theory of documental/instrumental translation

The questions so far raised with respect to the second person of translational discourse finds an intriguing echo in Christiane Nord's distinction between documental and instrumental translation. According to Nord,

...ein ZT [kann] grundsätzlich in zwei Funktionsrelationen zu einem AT stehen: Er kann a) Dokument einer vorgegangenen ausgangskulturellen Kommunikationshandlung sein und b) Instrument in einer neuen

zielkulturellen Kommunikationshandlung, für das der Ausgangstext in bezug aud gewisse Merkmale eine Art Modell abgibt. (1989: 102)

[...a target text can basically have two functional relations to a source text. It can be (a) a document of a communicative action that has previously taken place in the source culture, and (b) an instrument in a new communicative action in the target culture, certain aspects of which have the source text as a kind of model.]

Nord elsewhere explains that "in documental translation, the receiver of the target text is informed about a communication event of which they do not form a part, whereas in instrumental translation they are the new addressees of the source text" (1991: 210). This distinction would seem to concern participative and observational second persons. Nord gives several basic examples: An English political speech telling Britons to "Buy British" would tend to be translated documentally into French or German (since the source-text second person is neither French nor German) whereas a cooking recipe would tend to be translated instrumentally (since the second person is potentially anyone seeking to put the recipe into practice). However, as Nord stresses, "there is no law here, and the translation depends on the instructions received" (1989: 102). That is, according to the axiomatic priority of purpose to which Nord subscribes, these are two basic modes of translation that can to a certain extent be illustrated on the basis of different kinds of texts but which are not entirely determined by source-text features. We are thus dealing with a further table of relationships: "A documental translation should be possible for all texts, whilst instrumental translation depends on the target receiver's capacity to respond to the subject or content of the source text" (Nord 1991: 211). As such, documental translation could correspond to what we have described as an observational second person, whilst an instrumental translation would require a participative second person. But are these strictly necessary conditions?

The distinction between documental and instrumental translation would appear to be quite fundamental. If it is true that the choice between the two modes cannot be made on the basis of any universal law, this does not imply that the modes themselves are not mutually exclusive in such a way that they cannot be mixed on the macrostructural level of translational discourse. The distinction might thus be formalised on the basis of classical examples like the following:

4a. Le premier mot de cette phrase a deux lettres.

which could be translated documentally as:

4b. The first word of the French sentence has two letters.

or instrumentally as:

4c. The first word of this sentence has three letters.

Interestingly, 4b is both documental and constative, whereas the instrumental 4c, although not a linguistically well formed performative, is certainly "doing things with words", in keeping with Austin's original description of performative functions.

Such examples suggest that a translation as a whole could be either documental (it may look back to a previous text) or instrumental (it may look forward to a future

use). Indeed, these terms could well represent categories (classes inherent in the nature of translation itself) rather than concepts (abstract ideas used to analyse translation). If this is so, we would have a further reason why the documental/instrumental distinction should be of considerable interest for the kind of second-person correlations we are seeking.

Nord's distinction enables the hypothesis of target-text performatives to be correlated not with source-text discourses (as done above) but with two different modes of translation. The hypothetical correlations that can be generated are as follows:

	Mode	Target text
Е	Documental	Constative
F	Instrumental	Performative
G	Instrumental	Constative
Н	Documental	Performative

On the basis of 4b, correlation E is demonstrably possible although perhaps not necessary. Also, if we can accept that the Québécois Macbeth is an instrumental translation (Brisset tells us it is conditioned by its function within Québécois nationalism), then F is similarly possible but perhaps not necessary. Moreover, our hypothetical reception of the Québécois Macbeth in France would make G possible, at least as a non-requited performative, which would in turn tell us that F is possible but definitely not necessary. The case that remains to be tested is H, the correlation of a documental mode with a translational performative, which is demonstrably not bound by necessity but may yet be possible. Indeed, if correlation H is found to be possible, then E is also possible but not necessary. So the real question to be asked is whether it is possible to have a documental translation that is also performative.

One of the prime examples Nord deals with is the translation of citations (1990a, 1990b, 1991). She finds that "in our culture, citations are mostly translated instrumentally" (1990a: 18), since what counts is their function in the target text. This conclusion is of particular interest because translational citations appearing in scholarly or political texts might intuitively be considered more documental than the surrounding target text, at least to the extent that they direct the reader's attention to an anterior authority. A conclusion based on modes thus appears to contradict a pragmatic intuition based on discursive reception. Could there be something wrong or inadequate in the original distinction between documental and instrumental modes? As above, Nord correctly subordinates such problems to the higher criteria of pragmatic purposes. But the apparent contradiction can also allow cited performatives to address distinctions between translational modes.

When I am translating sociological reports from Spanish into English, as I have been doing for years, I take all kinds of liberties to make the text instrumental for my specialized English-language readers, who I know are going to use certain kinds of information but not others. But when I come to a citation in the source text, be it of Bourdieu as a sociological authority or of a farmer complaining about European Community policies, I take great care to give a very straight documental rendering, to the point of making it obvious that the speaker is an authoritative sociologist or that the farmer is specifically Spanish (in the case of Bourdieu I even do the eminently documental work of finding the original French text rather translate indirectly from Spanish). Similarly, when translations are received, a switch from non-citational to citational text is commonly associated with a shift of attention, possibly moving from the question "How can I use this text?" to the attitude "What did the speaker say?".

There is thus some reason to believe that the translation of such citations can be associated with a documental mode and that non-citational text would then tend to allow an instrumental mode. But does fulfillment of these associations also imply that the documental translation of citations cannot be performative?

A relatively fresh example should answer this question.

On 5 November 1992 the President-Elect of the United States made a speech of which a fragment was translated into German as follows:

5a. 'Clinton verspricht Kontinuität [...]

"Die größte Geste guten Willens, die eine Nation mir gegenüber machen kann, ist es, während dieser Zeit ihre volle Zusammenarbeit mit unserem einzigen Präsidenten George Bush fortzusetzen. Den größten Fehler, den ein Gegner machen könnte, wäre es, die Entschlossenheit Amerikas während dieser Übergangsperiode zu unterschätzen." (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 6 November 1992)

This is a translated citation in the middle of a non-translational journalistic summary of the speech. As such, it conforms to the expected documental translational mode, displaying a syntactic complexity that suggests that no instrumental shortcuts have been taken. But the second translated sentence is interesting in its own right. It refers back to a source-text performative function, perhaps retranslatable as "I warn our enemies not to take advantage of this transition period".

Exactly who is this enemy? Why has it been rendered as "Gegner" and not the stronger "Feind", which was surely also available? Clinton himself did not name names, so a documental translation should not be expected to name names either. But a more instrumental approach, concerned with producing a new text for a new reader, can take the risk of filling in the gaps of implicit knowledge. Here is *Die Welt*'s version of the same fragments of the speech:

5b. 'Clinton warnt Saddam Hussein

'In seinem ersten Auftritt als neugewählter Präsident sandte Bill Clinton gestern eine kaum verhüllte Warnung an den irakischen Präsidenten Saddam Hussein, die Übergangsperiode der Macht nicht zu neuen politischen Abenteurn zu mißbrauchen. [...]

"Es gibt zur Stunde nur einen amtierenden Präsidenten in den USA und er heißt George Bush. Die schönste Geste des Goodwills, die mir irgendeine Nation zur Stunde entgegenbringen könnte, wäre die volle Kooperation mit ihm während dieser Übergangsperiode", sagte Clinton.' (Die Welt, 6 November 1992)

It is interesting that the citational part of this text similarly provides evidence of a documental mode of translation, this time making use of Anglicisms like "goodwill" and "Kooperation" that mark English-language origins. But the performative warning that the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* translated documentally has here been rendered through non-citational and possibly non-translational explicitation, perhaps in accordance with Nord's description of the instrumental mode as "a new communicative action [...] certain aspects of which have the source text as a model". The possibly non-translational status of the text should not be considered problematic for our current concerns (we could invent the properly translational alternative "I warn Saddam Hussein..."). What is far more interesting is the way this instrumental mode blocks second-person participation in the performative by naming a specific third person. The

newspaper's readers (with the unlikely exception of Saddam Hussein) are accorded a merely observational position as they watch Clinton warn one very particular enemy. In this case, a relatively instrumental translation strategy allows a constative translation of a performative. This should be no surprise, since we have already accepted the possibility of such a correlation (G in the above table).

If we now go back to the more consistently documental *Frankfurter Allgemeine* translation, it is interesting to consider why it does not use third-person explicitation (mention of Saddam Hussein or any other third person) in order to make the performative constative. Who could Clinton be warning here? A possible answer lies just a few pages further on in the newspaper in question. Since the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* readership is largely concerned with economics and finance, much mention is made of the GATT negotiations that were at that time threatening to lead to an all-out trade war between the European Community and the United States. Now, again, who might Clinton be warning? Perhaps not entirely Saddam Hussein. Perhaps also the European Community. That is, perhaps also a participative second person partly reached through the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*.

If this second reading can be admitted, at least as a possibility semantically supported by choice of the weaker term "Gegner", we find ourselves confronted with a documentally translated performative that could remain translationally performative. This possibility has been created by leaving the second-person status of the performative relatively open, avoiding explicatory restriction to a specific third person. And yet, despite this creative aspect of the translation, one could not attribute the "T" of the performative to the translator. How is it possible for this documental translation to function as a possible performative?

This example may be compared with the case of the chairperson opening a meeting. If "I declare the meeting open" is performative quite independently of its translation, could the same be said of a phrase like "I warn our non-English-speaking enemies" (Saddam Hussein, European farmers, German EC negotiators, or whomever)? The chairperson has the authority to perform, but President-Elect Clinton requires the work of a translator to perform interlingually. In fact, there must be doubts as to whether the English source-text sentence can have a fully performative function by itself. It is more like an instruction to a translator to extend and complete the performance (as Nord says, the mode of translation depends on the instruction). In this way, documental translation of an incomplete performative can produce at least a partly translational performative, given that the source-text utterance is itself only partly performative at this point.

Awareness of this performative mode must then force us to recognize the possibility of correlation F in the above table (documental mode with performative translation), thus revealing correlation A (documental mode with constative translation) to be possible but not necessary.

All four correlations between translation modes and the performative/constative distinction are thus possible but not necessary. This is good news for those who would value the variety and creativity of translation, but not such good news for attempts to regulate this variety in terms of grammatical rules based on necessity.

Conclusions

The first conclusion to be drawn from the above correlations is that they are weaker than might be expected of a grammar of translation, since none of the correlations in the second table can be classified as impossible. However, this is itself perhaps a correlative of the move from the question of limits to the question of modes, since modes are only properly alternatives when they are potentially available to the translator.

With respect to the text analysis leading to these weak results, a second conclusion must reflect some doubt about the categorical nature of the documental/instrumental distinction. Not only have we had to resort to the terms "relatively documental" and "relatively instrumental", but we have also been forced to recognize cases of non-correlation between Nord's distinction and the distinction between participative and observational second persons, despite the fact that these latter terms were implicit in Nord's original description. Although we might intuitively sense that a translation turns our attention one way or the other, actual analysis suggests that the difference between documental and instrumental translation has more to do with loose bundles of strategies than with a strictly either/or situation.

More optimistically, a third conclusion could be that the distinction between participative and observational second persons may well aspire to a categorical status, since it is not only pertinent to both the first-person and second-person analysis of translational performatives but may also prove able to define material and social parameters limiting the availability of certain translation modes and target-text functions. This is despite the open status of the borderline *Frankfurter Allgemeine* translation, which allows for both participative and observational receptions. Future work (in part sketched out in Pym 1992c) should probably focus more squarely on distinctions between second-person positions.

With similar optimism, our fourth conclusion should stress the productive nature of the shift from first-person to second-person analysis, which allows for the identification and categorization of certain major translational modes. It should also raise retrospective questions about the status of the second person in the original linguistic description of performatives. The shift should be thus seen as a piece of bridging theorization that could take linguistics from problems of comparing texts to those of the variants of translational discourse. It might also allow translation studies to ask pertinent questions of what once appeared to be solid linguistic descriptions of performatives. The direction of the shift is moreover in keeping with the target-focused research of non-linguistic approaches such as polysystem descriptions and *Skopostheorie*. As such, it might go some small way towards keeping linguistics in from the cold.

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