*Brynja Svane**

Reference Identification in Translation and Interpretation

Abstract

Reference identification is fundamental in any kind of human communication and decisive for the understanding of what others are trying to communicate. But it is not evident that speakers and hearers attach the same value to specific references to the real world that they exchange in an interaction. After a brief introduction to the problem different aspects of the relationship between specific and non-specific references in translation and interpretation are discussed and an analysis of potential strategies toward the translation of references is undertaken.

Reference identification is fundamental in any kind of human communication as it concerns the understanding of the phenomena in the real world that we try to talk about by the means of language. If a listener does not identify correctly a specific reference made by a speaker it means that there will be a misunderstanding of some kind and that the contact between the two communicators is threatened because they talk about different things, often without realising that it is so. In the most extreme cases the reference identification is so incomplete that there can be no understanding at all. The well-known Danish expression "Godaw mand, Økseskaft" illustrates this case. The expression is said to be related to an anecdotal situation where incomplete hearing causes complete lack of understanding. As I have heard the story it goes as follows. A man is sitting in a tree carving something. He is deaf but wants to communicate and therefore tries to guess what people will be saying to him when they perceive him in this strange position. Some people approach him and he says to himself: they will probably ask what I am doing, so I am going to answer politely and explain it to them. These people do in fact speak when they come nearer, but only to greet the man in the tree: "Godaw mand" (= *how do you do)*. As he does not actually hear, he re-

* *Brynja Svane*
Department of Languages and Culture
Roskilde University
P.O. Box 260
4000 Roskilde (DK)

sponds to what he *thinks* they say (*what are you doing?*) so he quite innocently gives his famous reply: "Økseskaft" (= *handle of an axe*). This would be appropriate in a different context but certainly not as an answer to an innocent greeting, which explains why the expression has come to mean *total lack of meaningful communication* and is often used when incorrect reference identification is evident in a conversation.

1. References in communication

In translation and interpretation correct reference identification is particularly difficult, as the communication passes indirectly from the speaker (sender) to the hearer (receiver) by the means of the translator whose task it is to transform the value that words have in one language to a similar value in another language. As everyone knows this process is not simple, because two words in different languages very seldom have exactly the same meaning. But the process of transforming words containing specific references to a reality which might not be the same for the users of the two languages is even more complicated and often causes serious problems.[1] In many cases the translator has to choose a special strategy in order to give meaning to the translated version of the reference in the text. To understand this complicated transformation process it is useful to consider it both from a communicative and from a cognitive standpoint.

It is a common belief that, in general, communication is symmetrical, that is to say that the hearer is supposed to perceive more or less what the speaker says unless technical disturbances make this impossible as in the anecdote mentioned above. This assumption seems to be connected to some kind of ideal expectation as to how successful communication functions, not as a "Godaw mand, Økseskaft" type of interaction, but as a symmetrical, logical and mutually understandable series of turntakings, where each of the parties responds to what the other actually says. It is supposed that the hearer in a successful spoken conversation will be able to form his or her own mental images of the real world phenomena that the speaker refers to and that these mental images will be more or less identical to those that the speaker had in mind. Furthermore the mental images formed by both speaker and hearer are supposed to form a coherent and true picture of these real world phenomena. As a part of this

[1] Interesting examples that illustrate the problem are found for instance in Newmark 1982/88 and in Newmark 1991 where a distinction is made between referential and pragmatic translation. Even though I do not believe that this distinction can be made so sharply, it certainly helps define the problem.

conception of successful communication we find also the assumption that unsuccessful communication can be brought to function this way if the communicators see to it that all *felicity conditions* are fulfilled. As far as this is concerned a good deal of the modern pragmatic literature departs from the works of Grice, Austin and Searle.[2]

The idealised model of successful communication seen as a perfectly symmetrical understanding process seems to lie behind many descriptions of communicative interaction. An explicit demonstration is given in Figure 1 which is borrowed from Erling Wande's reactualisation of the Norwegian philosopher Frode Strømnes who wrote about problems concerning the possibilities and limitations of words as a means of communicating visual and graphic information. In Figure 1 the oral communication passes through a narrow channel and the identification of the words permits the hearer to form mental images that are identical to those of the speaker and thus to identify correctly the real world phenomenon that the speaker refers to in this example, namely a house:

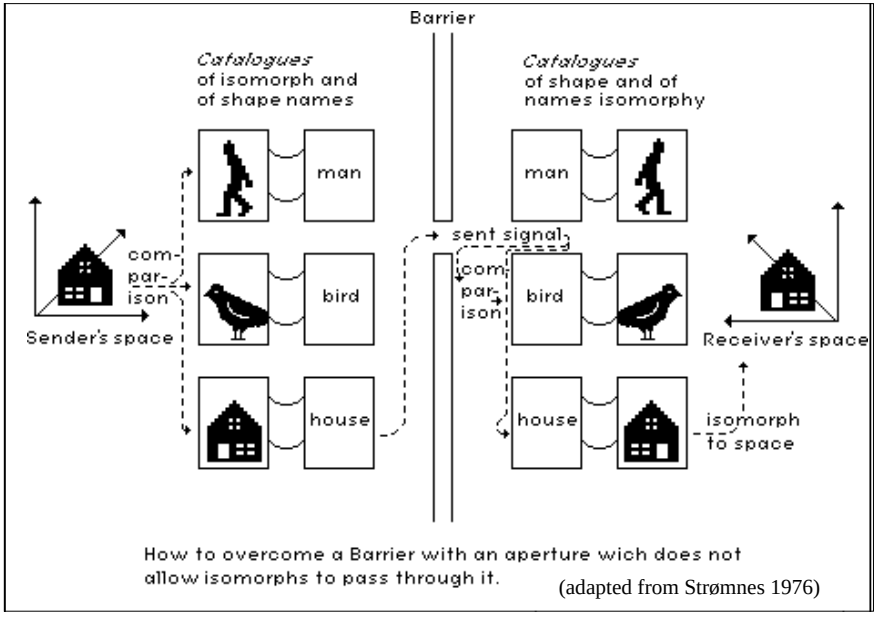

Figure 1. Idealised model of symmetrical communication (Wande 1990/in press, Strømnes 1976)

---

[2] The three great fathers of pragmatics, Grice, Austin and Searle have the common goal of bettering the functioning of communication. And a clear ethical standpoint seems to lie behind the theory as well as a firm belief that success can be achieved in this domain.

Contrary to what is often supposed, the perfect symmetry illustrated in Figure 1 is very rare in practical every day communication that goes beyond the simplest exchange of isolated words with an evident reference to specific objects that both sender and receiver have a perfect knowledge of and focus on at the precise moment of the interaction. Eugene A. Nida already pointed this out when at an early stage he formulated three fundamental presuppositions of communication, thus focusing on some of the difficulties of translation and pointing out the inadequacy of dictionaries:

> *"(1) no word (or semantic unit) ever has exactly the same meaning in two different utterances; (2) there are no complete synonyms within a language; (3) there are no exact correspondences between related words in different languages. In other words, perfect communication is impossible, and all communication is one of degree."*[3]

In work contexts perfect, symmetrical communication is more frequent than in more private contexts, and a relatively high degree of correct reference identification can normally be expected. When incorrect reference identification unexpectedly occurs in work contexts this often leads to serious mistakes, because inappropriate actions can follow from it (incorrect handling of a machine, incorrect information to customers, etc.). Much attention is therefore paid to the correct functioning of this type of communication.[4]

In every day communication perfect symmetrical understanding can only be supposed to occur in situations where the context clearly defines the reference, because the words in themselves do not assure that the speaker and the listener have similar associations. If a speaker says *bird* the listener is free to interpret this at an abstract level as some kind of non-specific *bird* or to associate to specific birds he or she knows of, either natural kinds (*sparrows, robins, blackbirds, wagtails, tits*, etc.) or maybe his or her own *pet bird* or some *symbolic bird* (the poetic *swans, doves*, *ravens* etc.). In certain cases, however, the context sets limits on the number of associations and thus provides the conditions for an identical reference identification in speaker and hearer.[5]

---

3 Nida 1958. Cited from reprint 1975, 5.

4 Falzon 1989 gives a good overview of some of the research on the functioning of communication in work contexts. This domain ows a lot also to the works of Jens Rasmussen (Risø, Denmark) on man-machine interaction and error analysis.

5 This is further developed in Svane & Bernsen 1992/93, Svane 1993 and in press a, b and c.

Symmetrical understanding that does not fully correspond to what is communicated at the word level might occur, however, in connection to sentences like “Look at that little *bird*”, spoken in a situation where both speaker and listener have before them a *sparrow*. It is likely that both will in fact interpret the general reference *bird* as a specific reference to the kind of bird called *sparrow* and more precisely to the specimen in front of them. That is to say that they will probably both understand the generalisation *bird* in much more specific terms and at a lower level of abstraction than the one that actually corresponds to the words spoken. But their understanding will nevertheless be symmetrical as they focus on the same object in the real world, and the communication will be successful with perfect reference identification on both sides. Provided of course that both of them concentrate on this little conversation and do not think about other things, and provided that they are both familiar with the sparrow as one of the most common garden birds in Europe.

In this particular case, however, the speaker, thinking of the sparrow in front of him or her might as well have said “Look at that *sparrow*”. In the described context this would probably have evoked exactly the same reactions from the hearer who spontaneously would be likely to identify the reference as concerning the *sparrow* in front of the interlocutors. But in a different context where nothing would point directly to a precise object, the hearer would have much more freedom in his or her choice of identification possibilities for the reference. In this case he or she would not necessarily form a mental image of a sparrow but would focus instead on some kind of abstract bird at a higher abstraction level than the one used by the speaker or on some other specific bird. The mental picture might also in certain cases have likenesses with what would be conceived as a prototypical bird.

This points to an interesting aspect of reference identification. It seems that the understanding of a reference is not necessarily dependent on the degree of specification, i.e. the level of abstraction, in the exact words spoken. From a general reference like for instance *bird* a receiver can form mental images of something more specific like a *sparrow*. And from something specific (*sparrow*), a listener can on the contrary form a generalised mental image (*bird*), or, which is perhaps more likely to happen, he or she can form specific mental images that for some reason or another do not match the specific references which the speaker intended to make. The *sparrow* in the sentence “Look at that *sparrow*”, can thus be understood as a *robin* or as any other kind of specific garden bird by a

listener who does not too well know a sparrow and to whom a prototypical bird has more likenesses with specific natural kinds other than the sparrow. These different ways of interpreting general or specific references are schematically illustrated in Figure 2.

SENDER	RECEIVER
specific reference (sparrow)	specific understanding (sparrow)
specific reference (sparrow)	general understanding (bird)
general reference (bird)	general understanding (bird)
general reference (bird)	specific understanding (sparrow)

Figure 2. Different combinations in communication involving specific and general references to phenomena in the real world.

The mechanisms of understanding that allow the shifts between specific and more general levels of understanding are illustrated in Figure 3 where different potential specifications are listed as possibilities that the speaker and hearer can individually choose to focus on in an interaction involving some kind of general term that they share in an interaction.

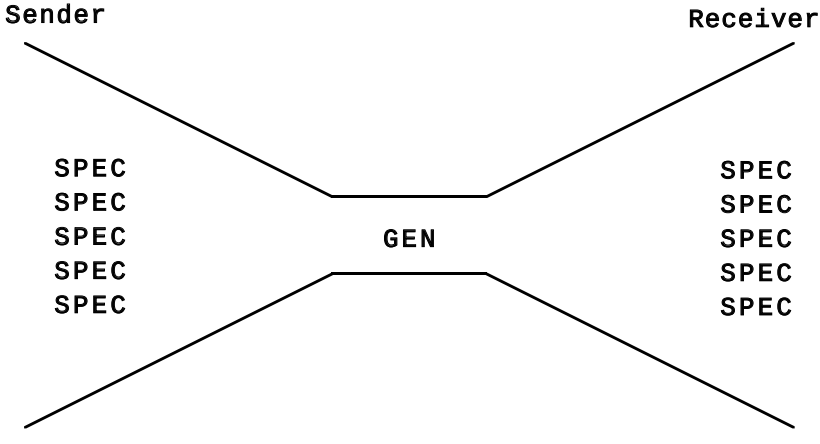

Figure 3. Mechanisms of understanding: sets of potential specifications.

In most cases the choice of a given specification in understanding is spontaneous and more or less unconscious. The listener who identifies the reference *bird* as a *sparrow* in the above given example does this immediately without thinking. But theoretically he can be said to choose the specification *sparrow* from a set of possible interpretations (Svane and Bernsen 1992/93) or, to use Strømnes' terminology, from the "cata-

logue" (Strømnes 1976) of recognisable objects and words that he has acquired through linguistic, cultural and other experiences.

Figure 4 is an application of the same model to the case mentioned above where the general reference *bird* could be interpreted at a more specific level as *sparrow* by the speaker and the listener whose interpretations of the words spoken were influenced by a context pointing not to abstract birds but to a specific sparrow in front of them. The speaker and listener in question might have rather similar sets of specifications to choose from (as illustrated in Figure 4), but under different conditions they would perhaps not both have chosen *sparrow* at the same time.

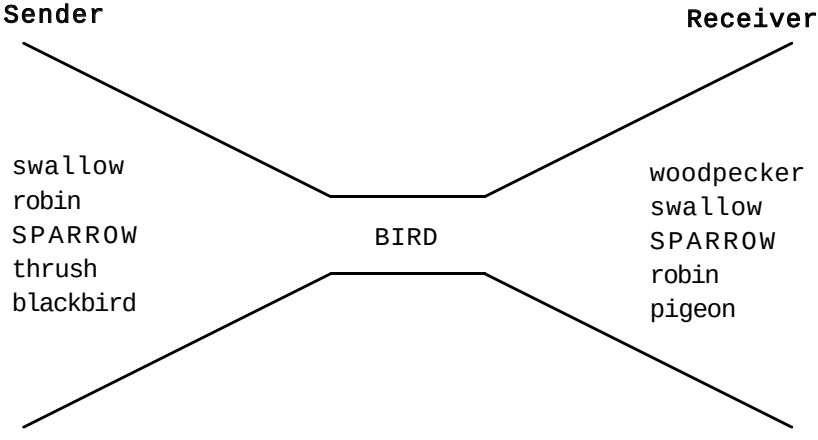

Figure 4. Possible sets of specifications for *bird*. In both sender and receiver *sparrow* has been selected.

Cultural, personal and linguistic experiences differ considerably from individual to individual, and therefore two persons are likely to have quite different associations to practically every word they exchange in a conversation. In other words, the mental images formed by the speaker and the hearer might have only a vague resemblance, and the details of their specific understanding can be totally different. A concrete and perhaps slightly exaggerated illustration of this is given in Figure 5 where the word *house* exchanged in an interaction evokes rather different representations of houses in the minds of the speaker and the hearer.

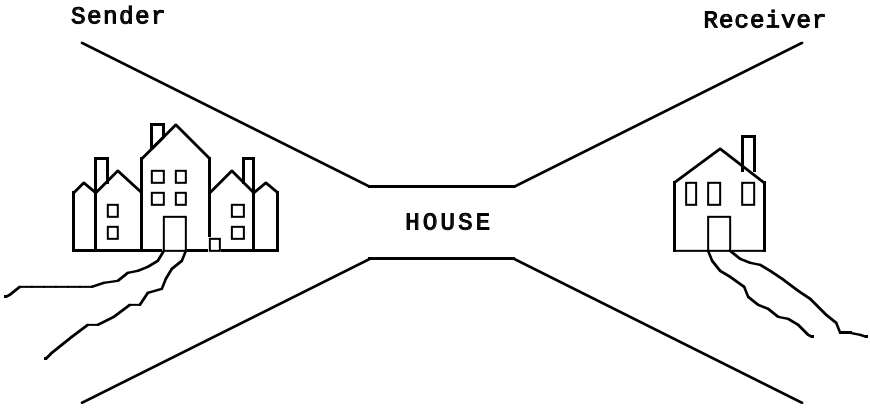

Figure 5. Asymmetrical understanding in communication: different specific interpretations of the general reference *house*.

In every day monolingual communication this type of variation in the specific understanding of references is to some extent limited by the context, and the similarity of background knowledge that characterises a given linguistic and cultural community will in many cases help the communicators identify correctly the references occurring during the interaction. But in the case of plurilingual communication like translation or interpretation the linguistic and cultural barriers may be extremely difficult to overcome and asymmetric understanding of the kind described above risks to be the norm rather than the exception, unless special attention is given to the problem of reference identification.

2. Translation and interpretation as communication

Translation and interpretation will always be related to a concrete communication context where differences in linguistic and cultural codes play an important part. The structure of the communication can be schematically illustrated by inserting into the well-known, simple communication model the translation process which functions as an intermediate state between the sender and the receiver. This creates what Sylfest Lomheim has called a “trilogue” as opposed to an ordinary “dialogue” (Lomheim 1989). For practical reasons the term translation is used in the following figures to cover both written translation and oral interpretation. Figure 6 shows the simplified (but very practical) model that is generally used to illustrate the communication process.

Figure 6. Ordinary monolingual communication.

Many texts which are later translated are originally conceived in a relatively simple and monolingual context of communication and thus fit into this model as far as the original SL version is concerned. Figure 7 illustrates the more complicated type of plurilingual communication where translation or interpretation is necessary for the production of a new text that the receiver will be able to understand.

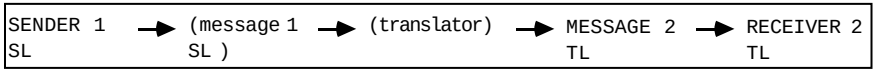

Figure 7. Bilingual communication with an intermediate translator/interpreter. SL indicates the parts of the communication that belong to the *source language* whereas TL indicates the parts that belong to the *target language*.

In Figure 7 *message 1* and the *translator* are enclosed by parentheses in order to underline the fact that the translation as a whole is an intermediate state that is partly invisible for the receiver of *message 2*. In spite of this, the intermediate state is to be considered as an extremely important one, because the translator will inevitably influence the text and change it in certain ways, as he or she has several functions which imply cognitive activity. Firstly the translator is the *receiver* of the original message which means that his or her understanding of the text is decisive for the meaning that is related to it. Secondly the translator becomes the sender of the new TL message which means that his or her ability to express adequately the meaning of the text is decisive for the way it presents itself to the new receiver. The cognitive activity of the translator influences of course both form and content of the text in question, as the ties between the two aspects are very close.

As it is shown in Figure 7, a communication process involving translation or interpretation consists in fact of several different communication processes that are more or less separated in time and place. In the case of written translation of elder texts the distance is longest, in the case of simultaneous oral interpretation it is shortest.

In the case where a long interval of time separates the genesis of the original text and the moment of its translation, the translator can by no means be an integrated part of the so called *primary public*.[6] He or she

6 The terms *primary* and *secondary public* have been borrowed from the Danish literary critic Sven Møller Kristensen, who was one of the first to introduce the sociology of literature in Denmark.

will clearly belong to a *secondary* or even more remote public that the author cannot have had in mind when the text was originally created. In extreme cases the translator will not even belong to an authentic secondary public and comes to know the text only because someone asks for a translation. But even if this is not the case, the temporal and cultural distance between the original sender and the translator as a receiver will be considerable when elder texts are to be translated. A similar distance will separate the author from any modern reader, and in the case of a translated text, the distance is enlarged by the fact that a translator is inserted as an intermediate stage. But in spite of this, the reader of a translated text will often have the feeling of being close to the author and will not be aware of the invisible activity of the translator.

A person who buys a Danish edition of Goethe will normally expect to read Goethe and very few people will think of the fact that what they are going to read is *not* Goethe himself but a given translator's interpretation of Goethe. If the translation is good there is in fact no reason to think of this and one can enjoy the text without being disturbed by the transformations made by the translator, because these transformations contribute to shorten the linguistic and cultural distance between the original elder text and a modern reader. But translations often involve more fundamental transformations of a text, and in extreme cases they can be almost unrecognisable due to numerous abbreviations and rewritings of passages in the original. This may lead to very different conceptions of the text in different countries, as the readers of the translations will actually be reading a text that differs considerably from the original. This is the case, for instance, of many of the English translations of Hans Christian Andersen[7] and of translations into German and Danish of the French 19th century author Eugène Sue.[8] Even modern authors risk to have their work mutilated in translations in cases where the translation process is at the same time a sort of revision which leaves out important parts. This seems to have been the case of the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren who did not recognise her own work in a French translation and consequently sued the editor.

---

7 Viggo Hjørnager has compared a number of translations into English of the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and has drawn our attention to the deep and meaningful changes that many of these translations represent compared to the originals. Paper presented at ADLA's Årsmøde, held at Handelshøjskolen, Århus, Jan. 28-20. 1993).

8 Grubitzsch (1977) has found that almost all social and economic aspects of Eugene Sue's novel *Les Mystères de Paris* were cut out in the German translations. In Danish translations of this novel the changes seem to be more or less similar (Svane 1988).

Generally, however, translations of modern texts can be expected to be more faithful to the author, because the translator of a modern text often belongs to the primary public of the author or is in some way close to this public that the author more or less consciously addresses directly. This means that the distance between the original sender and the translator as a receiver will be shorter for a modern text than for an elder text. The potential reader of the translation may also be close to the primary public, separated from it mainly by linguistic problems, and the objective distance between sender and receiver will be relatively short compared to the case of an elder text being read in translation. In practice this difference does not however seem to play a very important role, as the translator in most cases remains "invisible" and at the same time fulfils the task of approaching the original text to the reader, both on the linguistic and the cultural level. Only "errors" and obvious biases in the translation are likely to destroy this illusion.

Interpretation is very different from translation as far as this aspect is concerned. The distance in time and space between the original speaker, the interpreter and the foreign receiver is minimal, and the activity of the interpreter is by no means invisible. Normally the three persons involved in the complicated, plurilingual communication act will be in the same room at the same time and - which is even more important - the speaker will be fully aware of the presence of one or more listeners who do not listen to the original speech but have access to it only through the new version given by the interpreter. The listener will also be fully aware of the role played by the interpreter and will have certain knowledge of the indirectness of the communication. As opposed to what is the case in translation of written texts, especially elder ones, the interpreter as well as the foreign receiver will be very close to the primary public in a communication situation that involves oral interpretation, and very often the foreign listener will be an essential part of what is in fact the *primary public* of the speaker, that is to say the public he or she directly addresses in order to get a message through.

The important differences between translation and interpretation as communication forms have consequences for the problem of reference identification. As it was said above the possibility of correctly identifying references is dependent on the context and will differ considerably in different types of communication. The longer the linguistic and cultural distance between the communicators, the more difficult the reference identification tends to be. This difference does not however change the

fundamental structure of the communication situation. The mechanisms illustrated in Figure 7 will apply to almost any type of communication where translation or interpretation is involved, and the cognitive processes involved in the different encoding and decoding activities will roughly follow principles that are more or less identical in translation and interpretation.[9] These cognitive processes are schematically represented in Figure 8.

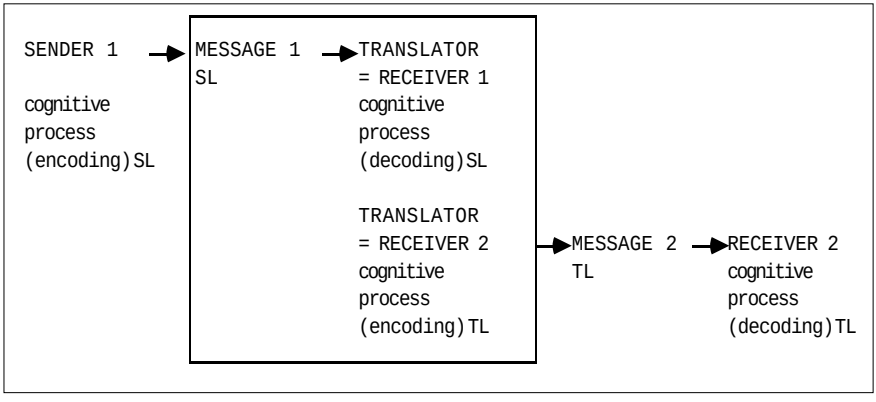

Figure 8. The translator as receiver and sender of messages. Inside the frame is found the "invisible" part of the communication, that is the activity of the translator who serves as an intermediate between s*ender 1* and r*eceiver 2*.

The perspective on translation which lies behind the description above corresponds to the ideal for good translation that is commonly accepted today. The essence of this ideal is to see translation as a *communicative activity* where the important thing is to reach the reader or the listener and get through with the meaning of the text. This is not always possible if the form of a given text is to be reproduced exactly, and in the case of conflict modern translation theory tends to prefer an exact rendering of meaning to an exact rendering of form.[10] The result is that translations acquire a more or less independent status as communication acts and that the aspect of reproduction is minimised.

---

[9] Considerations about working conditions, time available and numerous other differences between translation and interpretation are not taken into account here as these factors do not profoundly affect the cognitive pattern of the translation process although they are extremely important for the strategy of translation chosen.

[10] Eugene A. Nida (1964) was one of the first to point out that meaning was more important than form. His ideas have been of great inspiration to the textlinguistic and textanalytic approach to translation.

At the same time the problem of reference becomes even more important than it would be in a type of translation which would tend more to be a reproduction. This is related to the double role that references will have in a translation having an independent communicative status. The references in such a text must be of a kind that will be immediately understood by the TL receivers, that is to say that references must be understandable from the linguistic and cultural situation of these receivers. But at the same time the meaning of the original text is to be rendered, which requires a certain exactness in the rendering of the references given in the original text. This means that the translation of references to real world phenomena inevitably turns into a constantly difficult choice between Scylla and Charybdis.

3. Translation of specific and non-specific references

Most translators and interpreters are perfectly aware of the difficulties in translating references to the real world from one linguistic and cultural context to the other, and they seem to dispose of different strategies that are likely to function adequately in different situations.

The main problem with references in translation is that the TL public often does not understand the references if they are reproduced directly from the SL text. On the other hand, if the references are too radically changed, the TL text risks to be too different from the original. The choice of an adequate strategy towards this problem is therefore of great importance in any translation or interpretation and a wide range of different strategies can be seen in different types of texts and contexts. The strategies available are to be found in the continuum between a direct reproduction of the reference in the exact form it has in the original and a totally free re-creation of a similar reference. In the latter case the meaning of the text has been preserved, while the form has been changed, whereas in the first case the meaning is often lost, while the form is preserved. But there is no indication that either of these strategies, or any strategy lying somewhere in between them in the continuum, would be adequate in all situations. They are rather to be seen as potential solutions that can be useful in relation to different parts of a given text. In other words, the same translator can use quite different strategies within the same text, and the success of the translation can be due to elegant changes of strategies in order to assure a high degree of fluency and comprehension for the TL public who of course will have a cultural and

linguistic background that differs more or less radically from that of the primary SL public.

The possible translations of specific and non-specific references correspond to the potential spectrum of understanding that was described above in the general part concerning references in communication. Some of the most commonly used strategies are: 1) Direct reproduction (without comments) of the SL reference in the TL text, 2) Commented and explained reproduction of the SL reference in the TL text, 3) Localisation[11] of the reference, i.e. a change of local colour, concrete details etc. in order to make the reference understandable to the TL public, and 4) Generalisation, i.e. a change in the level of abstraction so that a specific phenomenon that would supposedly not be recognised by the TL public is made more accessible. The following comments and examples describe these strategies in a more detailed way.

3.1. Direct reproduction (without comments) of the SL reference in the TL text

A specific reference can be reproduced directly as it is, which will probably lead to a lack of understanding in a TL receiver who will conceive the specific reference either as something general that he or she can think of or as a different specification that would correspond to the TL context of the receiver. Both interpretations will often be incorrect compared to the original. The consequences of incorrect reference identification will depend on the text type and the degree of precision demanded in the situation. The translator can choose the direct reproduction for different reasons, either hoping that it will be understood (which often might seem naïve) or knowing that it will not be understood but instead might create special effects like local colour, exotic effects, etc. Or he can choose it deliberately in certain specialised contexts where it might in fact be the best strategy available. This could be the case, for instance, in an interpretation context where every bit of exact information matters. In such a situation, the public will often be specialised enough to recognise special terms in other languages, and therefore a direct transmission of a reference is often better than a more or less inaccurate translation. A counterexample could be a direct reproduction in a literary text of proper names or names of geographic locations that will have no chance of being

[11] The term *localisation* is used here and later in this article to characterise the change of geographical and cultural context in a specific reference in order to adapt it to a new cultural and linguistic context.

recognised by the TL public. In this case generalisations will often be better (i.e. *a small town in northern Sweden* instead of *Pajala*) or an explanation, so that the reader gets both the exotic name and the information about the location of it.

3.2. Commented and explained reproduction of the SL reference in the TL text

The translated under texts to foreign films shown in Scandinavia are a valuable material for the study of the translation of specific and general references, because the medium is of a kind that requires immediate understanding in the receiver. If this expectation is not fulfilled, the film will seem boring and might not have the success it could have deserved. But the liberty of freely translating what is actually being said is extremely limited because a part of the audience can be expected to listen attentively to the original SL soundtrack while reading the TL texts. Another reason is the close relation between the pictures and the text: the length of the translation must be nearly the same as the original and the translation has to form a harmonious whole with the visual elements of the film. To assure the immediate understanding the translator is therefore forced to use a wide spectrum of strategies when translating specific references. Given that the audience has no time to "think" about the meaning, that lack of understanding would be extremely frustrating, and that the dynamic of a varied and fluent translation of the references can be an extra plus to the film, the translator has every interest in being creative. In the Danish translation of Woody Allen's film *Manhattan*[12] the different strategies seem to be very well adapted to the rhythm of the film. We find here examples of direct reproduction of a large number of specific references which apparently have much of the same function as they have in the original, namely to impress by rapid name dropping where the effect left by the lack of understanding in the spectator is certainly intended. But in other passages of the film the translator seems to have had a clear intention of facilitating the understanding by explaining to the spectator what kind of phenomenon in the real world the specific naming refers to, as in the following examples: *Radcliffe gymnasium, varehuset Bloomingdale's*, and *Chryslerbygningen*. This strategy is very effective and handy and will in many cases be far more adequate than a

[12] New York 1979, distributed in Europe shortly after the release. Sound track translated into Danish under texts by Ib Lindberg. Shown again in Danish TV2, January 1993.

direct reproduction (without comments) of a specific reference. For this reason, during their education, future translators and interpreters are often advised to choose this strategy.[13]

3.3. Localisation

A specific reference in the SL text can be replaced by a specific reference that in meaning is close to it (same semantic field or experiential domain) but which clearly belongs to the TL context and has no flavour of local SL colour. This type of translation will often have the advantage of being easily understood by the TL receiver and can be very efficient from a pedagogical point of view. In literature it might have a strong effect as it brings the text closer to the reader. But in some cases it might also prove to be disastrous because it risks to destroy the local colour of the original. Gunnel Engwall who has studied closely the different Swedish and French versions of Strindberg's texts has some very interesting examples of how Strindberg himself, in his French translation of *Fordringsägare,* replaced specific references to historic Swedish persons (*Karin Månsdotter* and *Ebba Brahe*) by a specific reference to *Charlotte Corday* who supposedly would be easier identifiable in a French context.[14] The comparison between the different versions of Strindberg's: *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* also illustrates the importance of making other types of specific references easily understandable in different cultural and linguistic contexts. This text is particularly interesting because Strindberg originally wrote it in French (or maybe translated it into French from his own writing in Swedish)[15]. Before the text was published it was revised by Georges Loiseau who seems to have changed, not only the grammar and the current vocabulary of Strindberg's text, but also the specific references to activities like fishing and the construction of a port. When the text later was to be translated into Swedish, the translator John Landquist chose to readapt many of these specific references to a Swedish context, which gives us the occasion to compare the different versions of localised specific references. For instance Landquist translates *ponton* by *kaj*, which strictly speaking is not correct but which corresponds to the con-

---

[13] Ingo (1991, 202), gives the following examples of good translations of this type from French to Swedish: *Honfleur* > *staden Honfleur, og Orly* > *Orly-flygfältet* .

[14] Engwall 1991, 142, analysis of the French version of *Fordringsägare* (*Les Créanciers*).

[15] Only the French manuscript exists. It was lost from the middle of the 1890'ies until 1973, when it was found in Oslo (Engwall 193, 169 and 1990, 115).

struction of a Swedish port.[16] A similar change is found when Landquist translates Loiseau's expression *traîner leurs filets* concerning the fishermen by *fiskarne hissa segel att hämta in sina sköter*, which describes more correctly the methods of fishing in the local Swedish context. Even more radical changes are made by Landquist in the two following cases: when he lets the Swedish travellers sleep *i sina hytter* instead of *sur le pont* proposed by Loiseau, and when he changes the *tide* described by Loiseau (*la marée houleuse*) to the Swedish *havsdyning* that corresponds to the conditions in the Stockholm *skärgård* where there is no tide.

3.4. Generalisation

If we look again at the Danish translation of Woody Allen's film Manhattan, we find here a number of well motivated generalisations that might have been chosen as alternatives to potential localisations. The following two examples illustrate the strategy of generalisation:

I have friends at *Random House.*	Jeg har venner på *forlaget.*
I won't be able to take the *Southampton house.*	Jeg kan ikke leje *sommerhus i ferien.*

I have not had the opportunity of asking the translator directly why he has chosen to give a generalisation instead of reproducing the specific reference in these two precise examples, but I suppose that the choice has been dictated by the assumption that a Danish public would not be able to relate to a specific reference like *Random House*, whereas the general term *forlag* (*editor*) gives associations to other well-known editors, both American and Danish.[17] The fact that the transformation of the reference allows the receiver to make personal associations to relevant institutions makes the understanding easy and gives the impression that the text is fluent and dynamic. A direct reproduction of the specific reference without any explanation might have had the opposite effect. It could have blocked the understanding thus excluding the spectator from an important part of the background for the story told. So in this case it seems that the lack of immediate precision which is always a characteristic of a generalisation, is preferable to a high degree of precision because it faci-

[16] This and the following examples are borrowed from Engwall 1983, 173.

[17] In relation to this it is interesting to note that in an article on the nobel prize in literature 1993 Random House is mentioned and referred to as *förlaget Random House*, in the Swedish newpaper *Dagens Nyheter* d (oct. 8. 1993). The reference is not left to stand alone but accompanied by an explanation. Similar examples can probably be found in Danish newspapers.

litates the access to the meaning behind the isolated words in the text. In the case of *Southampton house* a similar analysis can be made. No ordinary Danish spectator would be able to locate and identify this specific reference, whereas the fact of not being able to *leje sommerhus* (*rent a summer house*) gives adequate associations to a loss of comfort and freedom as a consequence of loosing one's work. In other words, the translation by means of this type of generalisation cannot of course be said to be incorrect. As in the example *Random House* the loss of precision is counterbalanced by a higher degree of understanding.

4. Differences between text types in translation and interpretation

It is evident that in a translation tradition that focuses on the global meaning of a text rather than on details in its form and tends to consider translation not as reproduction but rather as an independent "new" communication, there will be no general claim that references to the real world should always be reproduced in the TL text in the exact form they have in the SL text. Therefore it is logical that translation strategies like the *localisations* and *generalisations* mentioned above are acceptable in a large number of contexts. But it should be added that there are exceptions to this rule and that the degree of freedom accorded to the translator or the interpreter is of course dependent on the type of text to be translated and on the situation in which the communication takes place. Roughly speaking it can be said that in literary texts the freedom is greatest and in specialised texts like scientific works, law texts and user's instructions the freedom of the translator is most limited if it exists at all. Figure 9 illustrates the continuum between freedom and boundness and tries to situate different text types in it.

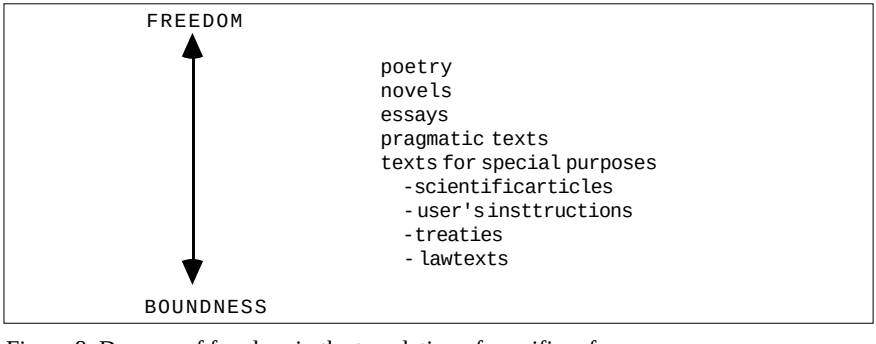

Figure 9. Degrees of freedom in the translation of specific references.

The different degrees of freedom in the reproduction of references to the real world concern not only the pure text types but are related also to differences between translation and interpretation. The latter is barely ever used in connection with literature whereas the first can be applied to literature as well as to texts for very specialised purposes with a high degree of specification and an absolute need for precision. It should also be added that certain strategies can only be employed when the working conditions are of a kind that permit reflection and allow the translator to go back and make changes.

For these reasons, localisation will be a more adequate strategy in translation than in interpretation. The interpreter hardly ever has time to think about what would be the very best way of reproducing a given specific reference and as the claims on precision are often absolute in an interpretation situation, the interpreter will tend to use the direct reproduction of specific references more often than the translator (with or without an explanation), and liberties taken will be more likely to be generalisations than localisations. In some cases generalisations are chosen by the interpreter as a sort of rescue if the exact identification of the specific reference is for some reasons impossible. This can be due to lack of hearing or to incomplete background knowledge. The latter explains why interpretation students use generalisations more frequently than experienced interpreters. But generalisations can also be a means of shortening less important parts of a speech thus permitting to concentrate more attention on more interesting and important parts.

The translation of Goethe's poem *Der König in Thule* by the Danish romantic poet Adam Oehlenschläger gives an idea of the degree of freedom that can be allowed in the translation of literary texts. The following verses[18] have been selected to illustrate the consequent localisation made by the translator who freely turns the vague northern location of *Thule* into the precise Danish location *Lejre* which gives associations to ancient times, as Lejre was the place where the kings of Denmark once had their residence.

GOETHE'S ORIGINAL	OEHLENSCHLÄGER'S TRANSLATION
Der König in *Thule* (title)	Kongen i *Lejre*
Es war ein König in *Thule* (1.1.)	Der var en Konning i *Lejre*
Dort auf dem *Schloss am Meer* (4.4.)	paa *Lejre ved Issefjord*
Hinunter in *die Flut* (5.4.)	i *Issefjordens Skød*

[18] Cited from Schiødt 1967, 90-91.

In Oehlenschläger's translation the localisation seems motivated and acceptable because it hits the tone of the original and at the same time creates a new poem for the SL public to whom the mention of Thule would have risked to have undesirable effects, maybe even comic because every child in Denmark would know that Thule is a location in Greenland where no king has ever had his residence.

Localisations of this type would on the contrary be unthinkable in certain other text types and the freedom of making generalisations is often restricted. In a pragmatic and informative text on the political situation in France it would not, for instance, be acceptable to replace the detailed description of the different political parties by general comments on politics. A localisation to a Danish context of the French *Parti Socialiste* and its most prominent member, *President Mitterrand*, would be of course totally impossible even though Denmark does have a corresponding political party, *Socialdemokratiet*. Not only would the informative value of the text hereby be reduced considerably, but it might even become obscure which country the information concerns and thus it would have no value at all. In a medical text the replacement of specific references to the diseases *appendicitis* and *ulcer* by the generalisation *stomach diseases* would be equally unacceptable.

But even in cases where strict limitations seem to force the translator to reproduce the specific references as precisely as possible or to give the nearest possible equivalent in the TL language, problems can arise because some references are in fact not understandable outside the linguistic and cultural context where they belong. Luckily for interpreters words like the famous Danish *søbekål*[19] figure mostly in literary texts and the translation will therefore be the problem of translators who have time to walk up and down the floor or find other ways of distracting themselves while they try to figure out what would be a perfect translation of this interesting dish. Similar problems can easily occur, however, in relation to any specific references that are closely attached to cultural contexts as is the case with a vast majority of proper nouns like for instance the following words in French: *Georges Sand, Gallimard, FNAC, Prix-Unique, Guignol* and *Saint-Germain*.[20]

---

[19] In the French translation of Wessel's text *søbekål* is translated by *ces choux-là*, a sort of generalisation which seems to be a relatively good solution to the problem, although it does not render the Danish meaning (Schiødt 1967, 89).

[20] Some interesting aspects of proper names as references and the metaphorical use of proper namesare found in Kleiber 1981 and Jonasson 1991 and in press.

But as it is generally agreed that translation and interpretation is in fact possible and necessary, there is no choice but to try and find the best possible solution, well knowing that in most cases even the best solution is imperfect and does not render exactly neither the exact reference to the intended real world phenomenon nor the context in which this belongs. It is my hope that a deeper study of the cognitive mechanisms of understanding as well as further analysis of available strategies concerning the translation of references will, if not make the task easier, at least explain why it is so difficult.

References

Austin, John (1962): *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Engwall, Gunnel (1983): "En dåres försvarstal i Samlade Skrifter", in: Engwall/ Geierstam (ed.): *Från språk till språk.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Engwall, Gunnel (1990): Strindberg, auteur français, traduit en suédois. Le cas du "Plaidoyer d'un fou" et d'"Inferno", in: *Stockholm Studies in Modern Philology* 9, s. 114-122.

Engwall, Gunnel (1991): "Frenchifying Fordringsägare, Strindberg as his own translator", in: Michael Robinson (ed.): *Strindberg and Genre*, Norvik Press, s. 137-147.

Falzon, Pierre (1989): *Ergonomie cognitive du dialogue*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

Grice, H.P. (1968): Utterer's meaning, sentence meaning and word meaning. In: *Foundations of Language 4*, 225-42.

Grubitzsch, Helga (1977): *Materialen zur Kritik des Feuilleton-Romans. Die geheimnisse von Paris von Eugène Sue*, Wiesbaden.

Ingo, Rune (1991): *Från källspråk til målspråk*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Jonasson, Kerstin (1991): Les noms propres métaphoriques: constructions et interprétation. In: *Langue française* 92, déc. 1991, 64-81.

Jonasson, Kerstin (in press): *Le nom propre. Constructions et interprétations.* Louvain-la-Neuve: De Boeck.

Georges Kleiber (1981): *Problèmes de référence: descriptions définies et noms propres*. Paris.

Lomheim, Sylfest (1989): *Omsetjingsteori*. Trøgstad.

Newmark, Peter (1982/88): *Approaches to translation*. New York e.a.: Prentice Hall.

Newmark, Peter (1991): *About translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Nida, Eugene (1958): Analysis of Meaning and Dictionary Making. In: *International Journal of American Linguistics 24, 4*, 279-292. Reprint in: Dil (ed.) *Language Structure and Translation*, essays by Eugene A. Nida. California: Stanford University Press 1975.

Nida, Eugene (1964): *Toward a science of Translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Schiødt, Hans Jørgen (1967): *Kommunikation og litteratur*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal

Searle, John (1969): *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sperber, Dan/Deirdre Wilson (1986): *Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Strømnes, Frode (1976): *A New Physics of Inner Worlds*. Tromsø: University of Tromsø, Institute of Social Science.

Svane, Brynja (1988): *Si les riches savaient!*. København: Akademisk Forlag.

Svane, Brynja and Niels Ole Bernsen (1992/1993): *Communication Failure and Mental Models.* Working Papers in Cognitive Science. WPCS-92-3. Published also in: *Proceedings from the XIIIth Scandinavian Conference on Linguistics*, Roskilde.

Svane, Brynja (in press a): *Identifikation af referencer i kommunikation mellem mennesker.* Working Paper, Center for Kognitionsforskning, Roskilde Universitet.

Svane, Brynja (in press b): Reference Identification in human communication. In: *Proceedings from the XIVth Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics*, section for *Cognitive Semantics*.

Svane, Brynja (in press c): Oversættelsesproblemer - hvordan oversætter man uoversættelige referencer? In: *Festskrift til Michel Olsen*, Aalborg Universitetscenter.

Wande, Erling (1990): Tänker finnar annorlunda än svenskar? In: *Stockholm Studies in Modern Philology, 9*. Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell International.

Wande, Erling (in press): Cognitive flexibility and grammatical space relations. In: *Fenno-ugrica suecana, 12*. Stockholm.