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Abstract

At all times, translation theorists (or rather: translators reflecting on the criteria they used in their translational activity) have found that it was the text type which guided their basic decisions as to global translation strategies (e.g. St. Jerome: Holy Sciptures vs. profane texts, or Rainer W. Jumpelt: Religious vs. aesthetic vs. ethnographic vs. linguistic vs. scientific vs. Humanities-related texts). In her 1971 book on the possibilities and limitations of translation criticism (English and French translations published in 2000 and 2002), respectively, Katherina Reiss first suggested a consistent translation-oriented text typology based on Karl Bühler‹s (1934) organon model of communicative functions, establishing a correlation between the type the source text can be assigned to and the global strategy or «method» the translator should follow in order to produce a target text that might be assigned to the same text type. Her model was definitely based on an equivalence framework that was never even questioned at the beginning of the 1970s.

Although she has always emphasized her view that the source text is the «conditio sine qua non» of translation, Katharina Reiss was often called the «founder» of Skopos Theory because, in her model, she suggested a «functional category» as an exception from the rule that the general relation between source and target text has to be one of functional equivalence. This functional category was to be applied in those cases where the target text was intended to serve a function other than that of the source text. In contrast, Hans J. Vermeer‹s Skopostheorie (first proposed as general framework for translating in 1978) suggested to look at translation the other way round: In his model, adequacy with regard to the skopos or purpose of the target text is the general aim, while equivalence can be regarded as the exceptional case where the translation brief requires equivalence of function or effect between source and target text.

In my paper, I will look at the differences and similarities of the two approaches, proposing a middle way: Instead of a typology of source texts, I suggest a typology of skopoi leading to different translation types and forms.