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Cultural Constellations and Translation

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0 Introduction

This paper discusses the theoretical and methodological aspects of translating ‘culture’ in texts. Although the phenomenon of culture has been a subject of great debate in Translation Studies ever since the ‘cultural turn’ in the 1980s (cf. Snell-Hornby 2006), the beginning of the 21st century finds Translation Studies still desiring an integrated methodology for identifying and translating ‘culture’ in texts. On the basis of a theoretical analysis and definition of culture (Mudersbach 2001), a methodological approach towards the systematic identification and rendering of cultural items in texts is presented. This paper will present a synopsis of older work in the area (Floros 2001, 2002 & 2005) as well as some later thoughts (e.g. Floros 2004) on the practicability of the models and methodologies discussed, mainly as far as didactic aspects of ‘cultural translation’ are concerned. The first part of the paper will present the theoretical basis for the models to follow in the second and third part? The paper will close with a discussion of practical issues emerging from the theoretical and methodological analysis.

1 The methodological aspect of culture in texts

1.1 Methodological problems of identifying and translating ‘culture’ in texts

When discussing the issue of ‘culture’ in texts, one is actually confronted with a two-fold problem: there is of course the problem of translating ‘culture’, i.e. rendering cultural phenomena from language A to language B following a concrete methodology, but before

rendering cultural items, it is crucial to understand how they are identified in texts. As to the second problem, Translation Studies seems to be trapped into bipolarity. There have been quite a lot, and sometimes controversial approaches to this issue, which could be distinguished into a *micro-structural* and a *macro-structural* group.¹ Approaches of the micro-structural group are based to a great extent on the ground-breaking elaborations of the *stylistique comparée* by Vinay/Darbelnet (1958) and regard cultural items as isolated occurrences in the text, usually at word-level (cf. Kade 1968, Koller 1979 & 1997, Barchudarow 1979, Kutz 1981, Newmark 1981 & 1988), Neubert 1985, Kupsch-Losereit 1990, 1995a & 1995b, Williams 1990, Valero-Garcés 1995, Aixelá 1995, Markstein 1999). However, these approaches do not touch upon the issue of the background knowledge involved in the transfer process of such cultural items from a methodological point of view. While the importance of such knowledge is not underestimated by these approaches, a methodological component for the systematic identification of cultural elements is not offered. The series of techniques suggested for transferring cultural items into the target language focus on transferring these items by presenting a vast range of alternatives/variants, but they do not include ways to identify them in texts. The same problem arises with so-called ‘hidden’ culture. ‘Hidden’ cultural elements are elements in a text which presuppose the activation of relevant background knowledge in order to be recognised as cultural specifics. A good example for ‘hidden’ culture could be the (American-)English utterance “*Don’t worry; you can take the next flight*”. Someone who does not belong to the same culture could think that an almost equivalent utterance in German could be for example “*Mach Dir keine Sorgen, Du kannst den nächsten Flug nehmen*”. But by considering that this utterance is spoken in the USA where travelling by air is much easier and frequent than in Europe, one could say that the two utterances do not mean the same thing. The reality expressed by the utterance in English could rather be compared to the reality expressed by a German utterance such as “*Mach Dir keine Sorgen, Du kannst den nächsten Zug nehmen*” (“*Don’t worry; you can take the next train*”), as the culturally comparable situation for Germany would be travelling by train rather than by air. Thus a ‘simple’ utterance, such as the above original, reveals itself as specific to a culture. The fact that the above example is a sentence and not a single word also points out that the micro-structural approaches are limited to the word-level and do not cover possible cultural elements at other levels, such as phrases or sentences, or even style. The micro-structural approaches examine cultural elements as isolated occurrences spread across the text without taking into consideration their possible interdependence within the textual framework. The following figure presents a depiction of the way micro-structural approaches examine culture in texts:

¹ This is done for classification purposes in order to gain a better overview.

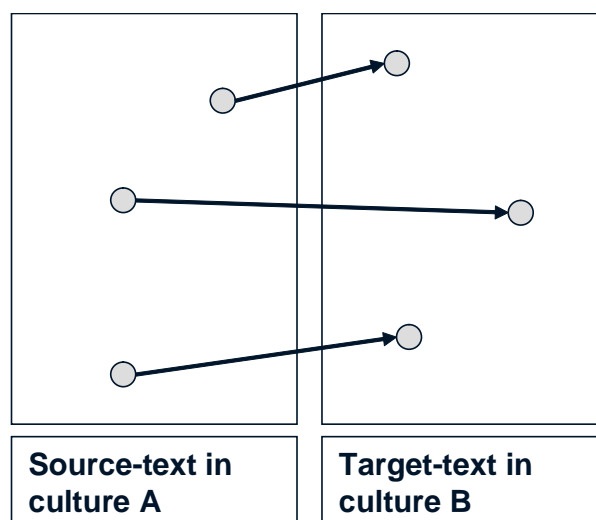


Fig. 1 The micro-structural approach to culture in texts

A totally different approach is offered by the macro-structural group, which regards the phenomenon of culture as a *Gestalt* in a text. Such an approach is offered by hermeneutics, introduced into Translation Studies by Ladmiral (1979) and strongly supported by Paepcke (1986) and Stolze (1992). According to hermeneutics the texts, as well as their translators, are embedded in a culture (cf. Stolze 1994:183) and the translator uses his/her intuition in order to recognize and transfer cultural specificity as a *Gestalt*, rather than as a sum of signs in the text. Paepcke argues that we should no longer translate words or sentences, but rather texts as wholes (cf. 1986:103f.). The methodological problems that arise from the hermeneutic approaches could be summarized in that the relations between the abstract phenomenon of culture and the texts are not clarified, nor is there any theoretical or methodological justification for the choice among the options available to translators. Translation seems to be a purely intuitive process without methodological transparency. The same problems are inherent in other macro-structural approaches, such as the ones suggested by Hönig/Kussmaul (1982/⁴1996) and Reiß/Vermeer (1984/²1991). The turn in the macro-structural approaches has been made with the ‘*scenes-and-frames*’ concept, which was introduced into Translation Studies by Vannerem/Snell-Hornby (1986) and which was supported and elaborated by Vermeer/Witte (1990). The ‘*scenes-and-frames*’ concept in Translation was inspired by Fillmore’s scenes-and-frames semantics (1977) and postulates that texts are seen as frames which evoke scenes in the head of the translator, which then are transferred as new frames into another text. According to Vannerem/Snell-Hornby (1986:189ff.):

For understanding a text A, the translator starts off with a given frame, i.e. the text and its linguistic components. This text is the product of an author, who created it on the basis of his/her own experience and repertoire of prototypical scenes. The overall frame of the text, as well as all other sub-frames within the text, evokes cognitive scenes in the reader’s perception. [...] The translator is confronted with frames of a foreign language, which are less familiar to him than the frames of his/her mother tongue. But as soon as he/she manages to capture all scenes behind a text, i.e. ‘understands’ the text, he/she is able to transfer this text to the target language.²

The decisive element added to this concept by Vermeer/Witte (1990:91) is the use of “channels” operating between frames and scenes, changing the ‘*scenes-and-frames*’ concept from a status-oriented model into a process-oriented model:

² Originally in German, translation by GF.

The culturally charged world experience (scene a, i.e. the original scene in the head of the producer) is modified on the basis of the purpose of writing and the recipients into a scene b and is fixed through a channel reduction into a text (frame a), in full awareness of culturally charged textual conventions.

The recipient receives the frame (as frame b) by activating his/her culturally charged world experience through a first channel amplification (temporarily as scene c) and forms a scene d, which deviates from scene c according to his/her specific interest and ideas about the author and the purpose of the text production (additional channel amplifications). During the reception process, scene d could be further 'corrected' by possible additional information and is finally extracted from the text as scene e.

In a translation process, the initial channel reduction (by the author) and the final channel amplification (by the target text recipient) occur in two different cultures.³

What seems to be rather problematic in the above approach is that the channel amplification is solely based on experience and not on any method in the sense of a sequence of steps. Consequently, the activation process of the background knowledge needed for translating again lacks transparency. Thus the problems encountered with the micro-structural approaches with respect to 'hidden' culture are again evident with the macro-structural approaches.

The following figure illustrates the macro-structural approach to 'culture' in texts:

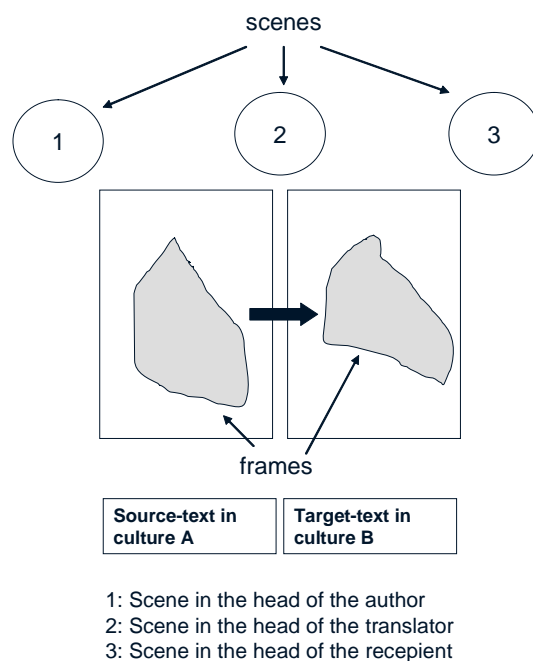


Fig. 2: The macro-structural approach to culture in texts

In order to overcome the methodological difficulties for identifying and translating 'culture' in texts, a theoretical discussion of the definition of culture is necessary. The most important issue in this regard is the choice of a definition of culture which is flexible enough to provide a suitable theoretical framework for methodologies, as was highlighted in the above discussion. Quite a lot of academic disciplines have been concerned with the attempt to define culture, leading to a multitude of definitions and approaches which could have been used or have indeed been used in Translation (for a critical overview of definitions and a discussion of their validity in Translation cf. Floros 2002 & 2005). For this paper, the definition of Mudersbach (2001) will offer the theoretical basis for a number of reasons, which will be summarized after the presentation of this definition below.

³ Originally in German, translation by GF.

1.2 Towards a definition of culture

The definition of culture presented by Mudersbach (2001) seems to be offering an adequate basis for the purposes of this paper. Actually, Mudersbach avoids presenting a concrete definition at the very beginning of his analysis. He approaches culture not globally, as a whole, but first by presenting the ‘ingredients’ that will lead to a definition at the end. He speaks about the social community and the areas of life (*Lebensbereiche*) where the members of this community interact. At first he is interested in exploring the possible areas where individuals act without yet being interested in a general whole that these areas could be forming. Such areas of life could be various festivities (Christmas celebration, Halloween etc.), economic fields (marketing, stock market, groups of companies etc), or eating habits (restaurant habits, kinds of food etc.). He distinguishes between areas of life where cultural social interaction takes place and other areas that cannot be regarded as cultural, as they represent objective knowledge, commonly shared by every culture, such as medicine, biological data etc. The concept of an area of life is a very flexible one according to Mudersbach. He contends that specific contexts evoke in the individual the respective areas of life and that it is the context that determines the evocation of a specific area of life instead of another. For example, the word ‘cake’ in a text about a birthday celebration would evoke the area of life ‘birthday celebration’, which would contain the food connected with such celebrations. But the word ‘cake’ in a text about recipes would evoke the area of life ‘cooking’. Areas of life are often interconnected and texts rarely have only one main topic. The way the members of a specific community act within an area of life is characterized by a specific role of those members as well as by the function that is fulfilled each time. Thus Mudersbach introduces the notion of a *cultural system*, which he defines to be a convention about a specific area of life fulfilling a specific function. This convention is created by the members of the community about the specific area of life and consists of all background knowledge that the members of a community share about this area, regardless of personal preferences, but including the evaluation of this knowledge by the members. For example, the individual preference of a member of a community not to follow the usual, conventional procedures of a certain festivity does not entail that this individual does not recognize these conventions as constituting this particular festivity within the social community it belongs to.

As a convention, the cultural system can be represented in a systematic way. So, while the area of life could be regarded as an amorphous construct, i.e. a vague representation of information in the minds of individuals, a cultural system is the organised, structured abstraction of this construct. Mudersbach regards cultural systems to be structured *holons*, which are made up of *holemes* and *subholemes*. These holemes and subholemes are elements of background knowledge that are interrelated: they fulfil a specific function to one another as well as to the holon itself. Thus Mudersbach’s understanding of a cultural system is a structural one. The recursive constitution of a convention about every imaginable area of life leads the community to the creation of a series of cultural systems, each one fulfilling a specific function. However, all cultural systems seem to share one common function: the function which aims at sustaining for each individual the meaning of belonging to a certain community, maintaining a common and homogenous identity (cf. Mudersbach 2001:186). Mudersbach takes culture to be this common invariant function of all cultural systems of a community. Consequently, according to Mudersbach, culture is not a set of characteristics or artefacts, but rather the function that is common to all of them.

Summarizing the above discussion, the features that characterize a particular cultural system, which is viewed as a holon, are the following:

- a name
- a function

- a structure
- a field of variations to account for differentiations within a social community, and
- an evaluation of each section of the system.

The following figure illustrates the process of examining culture by dividing it into areas of life and, subsequently, by representing them in forms of cultural systems:

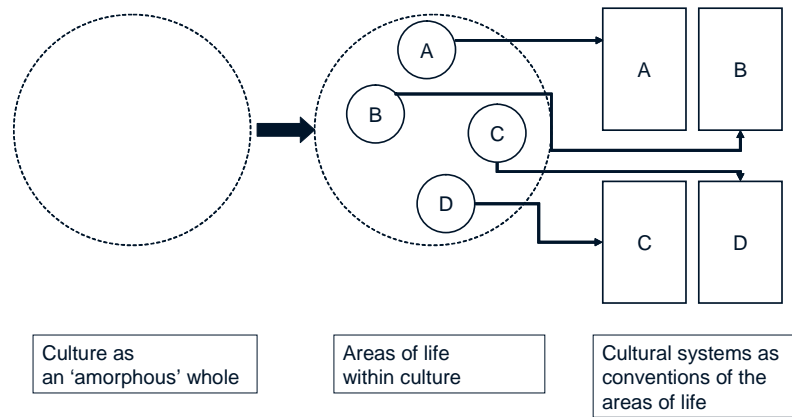


Fig. 3: 'Culture', areas of life and cultural systems

The definition by Mudersbach contains similarities with and differences from other definitions, both general ones as well as the ones used in Translation Studies so far. The first similarity is found in the fact that 'culture' is a phenomenon strictly associated with a social community. This is a premise found in all definitions, especially in the sociologically oriented or 'behavioristic' definitions, such as the ones by Goodenough (1964) and Göhring (1978). Another important, though partial, similarity is found in the structural character of culture. Structure is a feature described in many definitions, from the 'structural' definitions discussed in Kroeber/Kluckhohn (1952) through to Malinowski (1960) and Heinrichs (1998). One main difference, though, lies in the flexibility inherent in the concept of cultural systems by Mudersbach. While other definitions regard the structure of the phenomenon of culture as something given a priori, the concept supported by Mudersbach allows for ad hoc structuring, depending on the situational context. Another difference is that the structuring pattern provided by Mudersbach is a very detailed one (cf. holemes and subholemes, with almost unlimited structuring possibility), while other definitions only present gross subfields. The possibility for detailed structuring is a crucial condition for the comparability between cultures, provided that two cultural systems from different cultures are investigated contrastively.

A point where the definition by Mudersbach differs from other definitions is the 'content' of culture. Mudersbach avoids listing categories of culture. Instead, he talks about background knowledge, thus leaving the question of 'content' open to ad hoc interpretation. Mudersbach is more interested in the organization of the content than in the content itself. In a nutshell, Mudersbach does not prescribe what culture should contain, but rather views culture as an open list and provides the pattern, according to which any information found relevant to a specific area of life can be presented systematically in form of a cultural system.

Lastly, the issue of function is particularly stressed in Mudersbach's definition. In fact, function plays a key-role in this definition, as it is regarded to be the core of culture. Mudersbach is not concerned with whether culture has a function or not (cf. *instrumental* vs. *substantial* definition in Hansen, 1995), but rather accepts that culture, as an abstract phenomenon, is function itself. Beyond that, the systematic character of cultural systems

allows for a functional organization of the phenomenon of culture, which is similar to the functional organization of textual elements.

Before trying to show the usefulness of the above definition to Translation, one more aspect has to be taken into consideration, concerning the relationship between background knowledge and text. For the description of the manifestation of background knowledge in texts, the notion of *concretization* was introduced by Gerzymisch-Arbogast/Mudersbach 1998:64f. and Gerzymisch-Arbogast 1999:91. In their descriptions of holistic systems of knowledge in translation, Gerzymisch-Arbogast/Mudersbach distinguished two different levels of observation. The first one is the SYSTEMS level, where background knowledge in form of a system⁴ is located, the other one is the TEXT level, where this knowledge is manifested. As cultural systems represent background knowledge about a specific area of life, it is logical to assume that they are located on the SYSTEMS level⁵. When cultural systems or parts of them are manifested in texts, a connection between the SYSTEMS level and TEXT level is established. This connection is called *concretization*.

1.3 Methodological foundation and implications

The above presented definition proves to be operational for Translation for the following reasons:

- The understanding of culture as the function which aims at sustaining for each individual the meaning of belonging to a certain community, maintaining a common and homogenous identity, serves as a *tertium comparationis* in Translation. It is a point of comparison both for ‘cultures’ as well as for their concretizations in texts.
- The flexibility with which culture is organized is very important for the translation of a text, as it accounts for all possible situations that can be found there. The cultural elements found in a text do not have to be compared with gross categories defined a priori, but can be seen as concretizations of specific aspects of a culture. After all, not whole cultures are concretized in a text, but only aspects of them.
- The detailed organization of background knowledge in the form of cultural systems in the source culture provides a useful information database for understanding the text in the reception phase of translation. The same modelling of information for the target culture facilitates the comparability of cultures on an abstract level in the transfer phase and is a useful information database for the creation of a target text in the reproduction phase.
- Cultural systems allow for an understanding of cultural elements in texts not in terms of micro- or macrostructure but of any extent, ranging from the level of word to the level of text, thus surpassing the gross distinction between micro- and macrostructure. Apart from that, cultural systems provide the information for analyzing a text for ‘hidden’ cultural elements as well, i.e. elements that are not automatically recognized as cultural specifics, as is the case with ‘Realia’ (Reiß 1971:78).
- The flexibility in the organization of cultural systems is an indication that the creativity and competence of the translator are given ample space without leaving the whole process totally to the whims of intuition.

In addition to the definition and its methodological implications presented above, a concrete methodological basis is presented in this paper. Such a basis is again offered by Mudersbach with the HOLONTEX-method (cf. Mudersbach 1991:339), which was initially developed as a

⁴ For the notion of ‘system’ cf. Gerzymisch-Arbogast/Mudersbach 1998:334.

⁵ Cf. also de Beaugrande/Dressler (1981), where culture is taken to be part of the world knowledge.

method for the analysis of historical texts, but proves very useful in terms of the explicit treatment of the background knowledge needed for understanding any text, as well as the explicit connection of such knowledge to a text. The method consists of four steps, which can be described as follows:

- Step 1: First reading of the text in order to evoke the background knowledge (systems) that are relevant for the interpretation of both the form and the content of the text.
- Step 2: Listing and structuring of the evoked background knowledge into ‘systems’ in order for these elements to be easily comparable to elements contained in the text.
- Step 3: A repeated ‘holistic’ reading of the text in order to mark all textual segments that refer to a knowledge system. The same procedure is repeated for all background knowledge systems evoked in step 1 and listed in step 2 (see *concretization* above).
- Step 4: Evaluation of background knowledge systems and/or elements of these systems according to the purpose set for the reading.

Using this method, the reader of a text complements the actual text information with wider knowledge on the topics treated in the text. The structuring of the evoked background knowledge contributes to the systematic presentation of the knowledge needed to interpret the text and thus to the transparency of the interpretative process. This method will be used in a slightly amended form for the models describing the identification and translation of cultural elements below.

2 On the identification of cultural elements in texts

Before presenting the model for the identification of cultural elements in texts, it has to be clarified that the understanding of the translation process in this paper is methodologically considered a three-phase process, i.e. is divided into a reception, a transfer and a reproduction phase. The identification of cultural elements forms part of the reception phase in translation and will be described here integrating the micro- and the macro-structural approaches discussed in 1.1.

2.1 Cultural constellations

As mentioned above, a slightly amended form of the HOLONTEX-method by Mudersbach will be used here in combination with his theoretical analysis of ‘culture’ to describe the identification of ‘culture’ in texts. The suggested method consists again of four steps:

- Step 1: First reading of the source-text in order to evoke the cultural areas of life that surround it and are relevant for the interpretation of both its form and its content. This way, the source text is complemented by the implicit cultural information which is important for understanding its cultural dimension and, perhaps, cultural specificity.⁶ This step could be illustrated as follows:

⁶ It must be stressed here that while in Floros (2002) the first step of the reception phase stipulated that the first reading of the source-text aims at evoking cultural systems rather than cultural areas of life, this step must be reconsidered here, as the applicability of the method and the theoretical description of what is possibly happens in reality reveal that the first reading is unlikely to immediately evoke systematically presented cultural knowledge, as is the case with cultural systems. In general, the reading of a text seems to activate a rather broad and unspecific image of cultural phenomena involved in understanding a text. The systematic structuring, implied by the notion of a cultural system, can only occur at a chronologically later stage, i.e. in

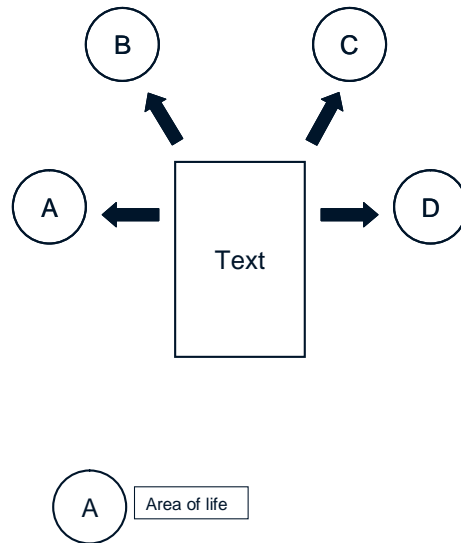


Fig. 4: Step 1 of the method for identifying 'culture'

- Step 2: A listing and structuring of the evoked areas of life in form of cultural systems of the source culture is undertaken as a second step. This way, the structured elements of cultural systems, which are conventions of the respective areas of life, becomes easily comparable to elements in the text. This step could be illustrated as follows:

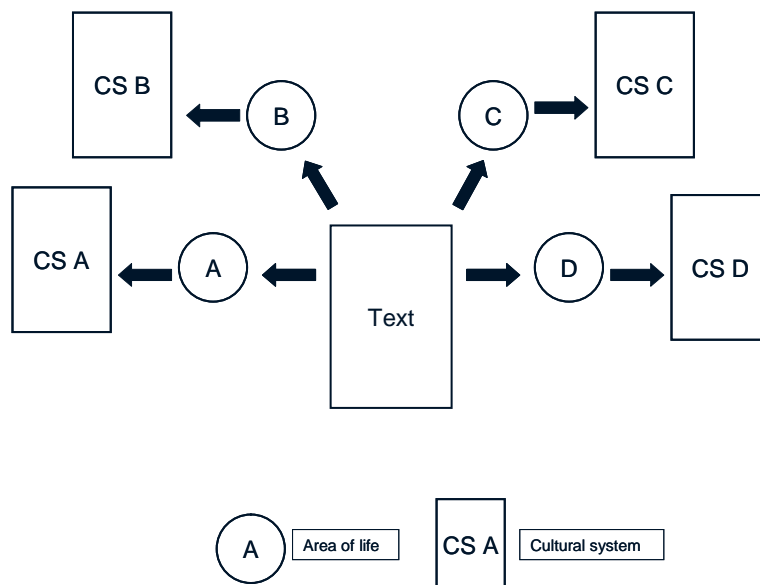


Fig. 5: Step 2 of the method for identifying cultural elements in texts

- Step 3: A repeated 'holistic' reading of the text marks all textual segments that refer to a cultural system. This is the connection of SYSTEMS level and TEXT level, described as *concretization* in 1.2. The concretization must take place for all cultural systems created in step 2. This step could be visualized as follows:

the second step. Thus the steps presented here seem to present a more logical description than the earlier version.

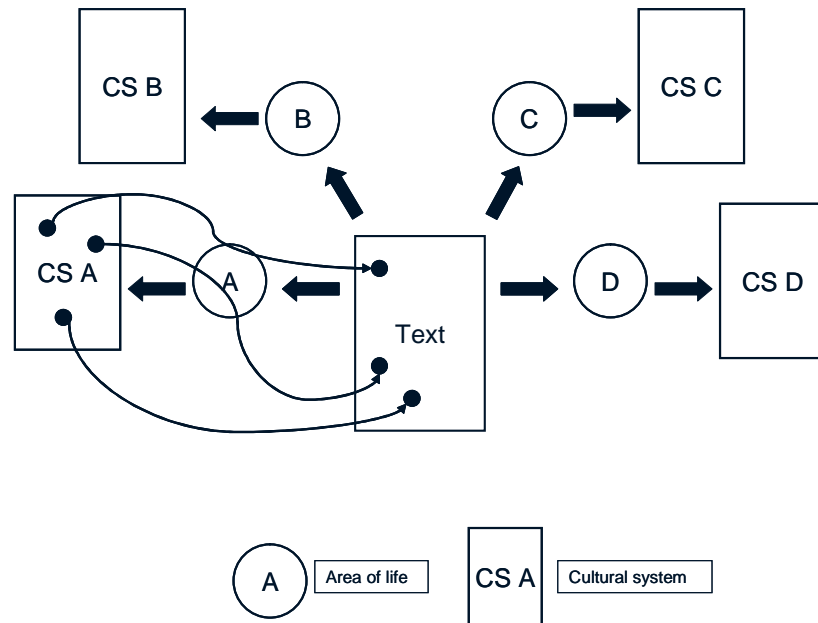


Fig. 6: Step 3 of the method for identifying cultural elements in texts (concretization)

Steps 1 and 3 can take place as many times as necessary in order to evoke the relevant areas of life (step 1) and mark all segments in the source-text referring to a respective cultural system (concretization – step 3). This two-way examination of SYSTEMS level and TEXT level is perhaps one of the most important sub-processes in the reception phase of translation, as it offers the possibility to retrieve important implicit information about textual elements and helps translators avoid a purely linear processing and rendering of textual information into a target-text, which would be closer to transcoding rather than translating.

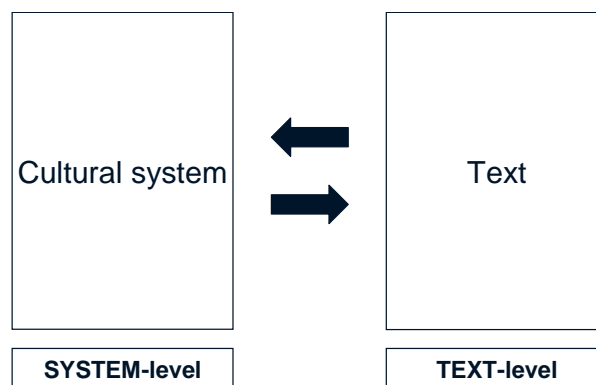


Fig. 7: Two-tier consideration of SYSTEMS level and TEXT level

- Step 4: The concretized elements of each cultural system in the source-text are related to or combined with a unit within the text. This unit could be spread over a smaller or larger part of the text and the respective units as a whole form a configuration of cultural elements, called *cultural constellation*. The cultural constellations created this way are then evaluated according to their function in the source-text. This step could be illustrated as follows:

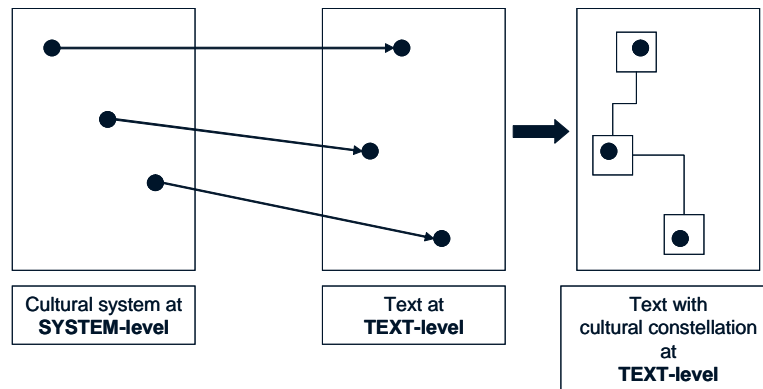


Fig. 8: Step 4 of the method for identifying cultural elements in texts as *cultural constellations*

Cultural constellations are constructs within the source-text, which help describe cultural elements in their textual dimension and not merely as isolated occurrences. The concept of a cultural constellation reconciles the extreme micro- and macrostructural approaches regarding the identification of cultural elements in texts by assigning them the necessary textual continuity and, at the same time, by stressing their distinctive character. Cultural constellation can thus be defined as follows:

A cultural constellation is a textual construct depicting all elements of a cultural system that are manifested in a text.

If steps 3 and 4 are followed repeatedly for all cultural systems evoked by the source-text reader, the translator will be able to identify a number of constellations equal to the number of cultural systems evoked. A possible depiction of the situation after the repeated application of steps 3 and 4 is given in the following figure, which presents the model of the identification of cultural elements in texts:

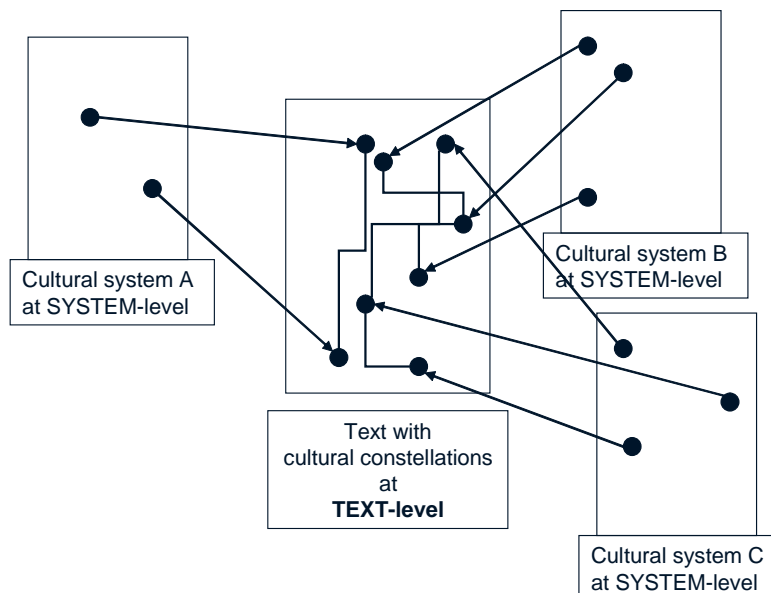


Fig. 9: Model for the identification of culture in texts

The result of applying the above method is a new version of a source-text, which is expanded by its implied extralinguistic background knowledge. The textual elements which show the manifestation of such knowledge are highlighted and are thus transparent in their individual

as well as their textual dimension. The final product is the result of a holistic analysis of the cultural boundness of the source-text. The method described will serve as the basis for subsequent steps described in part 3, concerning the transfer and reproduction phase of translation and completing the methodology for the identification of cultural elements in texts by an additional methodology for rendering them into a target text. Before that, the concept of cultural constellations needs to be further elaborated.

2.2 Theoretical description of cultural constellations

2.2.1 Types of cultural constellations

Using the terminology proposed by House (1997), a first distinction of cultural constellations could be made between *overt cultural constellations* and *covert cultural constellations*. The *overt* constellations appear within the source-text as manifestations of elements of cultural systems as described above. However, the elements of a cultural system that are not manifested in the source-text also play an important role in understanding the textual information, as they provide the wider context, within which the manifested elements are functioning and thus contribute to the general understanding of the source-text. By bringing together the non-manifest elements of a cultural system, another cultural constellation is formed, which can be called a *covert* cultural constellation. The following figure illustrates the difference between overt and covert cultural constellations.

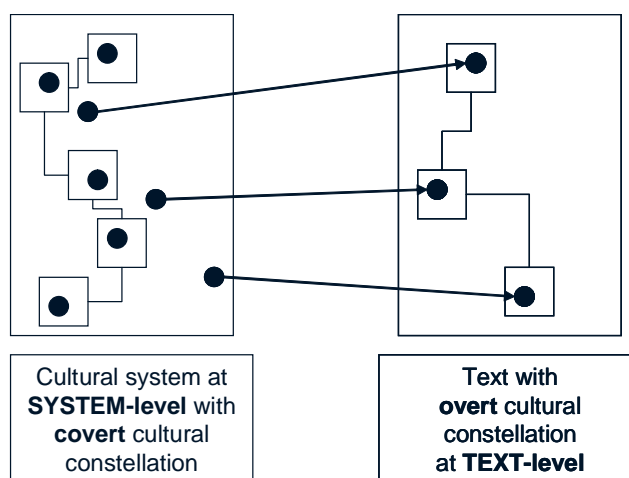


Fig. 10: Overt and covert cultural constellations

2.2.2 Overt cultural constellations

This paper will be examining overt cultural constellations only⁷, which can be of two main types: one concerning the *form*, the other concerning the *content*. Cultural constellations of form refer to *how* a text is written in terms of style, writing or other conventions, whereas cultural constellations of content refer to *what* a text contains in terms of cultural knowledge. For example, a cultural constellation of form could be bringing together formal elements of an advertisement or elements showing that a text belongs to a specific literary genre, while cultural constellations of content could be bringing together the cultural elements that reveal

⁷ Henceforth in this paper the term *cultural constellation* will only refer to *overt* cultural constellations.

specific attitudes, artefacts, beliefs, elements of a particular kind of organization or festivity etc.

2.2.3 Characteristics of overt cultural constellations

Both cultural constellations of form as well as those of content are further characterized by four factors:

- *Quantity*: The quantity refers to the number of cultural constellations identified in a text. This number is always equal to the number of cultural systems evoked by the text in step 1 of the method for identifying cultural elements in texts. For example, the quantity of cultural constellations in *Fig. 9* above is 3. The quantity is particularly important for the specification of the cultural boundness of a text.
- *Quality*: the quality of a cultural constellation refers to whether the elements it contains are *implicit* or *explicit*. This refers to the question of whether these elements can be identified immediately as cultural specifics (explicit elements, e.g. ‘*Realia*’) or whether they first need to be activated by background knowledge in order to be identified as cultural specifics (for an example of implicit elements or ‘hidden’ culture, see the utterance in 1.1). The investigation of the quality of cultural constellations could prove particularly important for issues of text typology and the choice of translation strategy.
- *Valency*: The valency of a cultural constellation refers to the number of explicit and implicit elements it contains. For example, in *Fig. 9* above, the valency of the cultural constellation A is 2, and the valency of each of the constellations B and C is 3.
- *Diffusion*: The diffusion of a cultural constellation refers to the way the elements of a cultural constellation are spread over the text, i.e. they could be concentrated in one part of the text or could be spread out over two or more parts, or even over the whole text. Since the constellations are connective constructs in texts, the diffusion of their elements is particularly important in terms of textual coherence (cf. Floros 2004 and 2005).

The following figure presents a summary of the kinds, types and characteristics of cultural constellations:

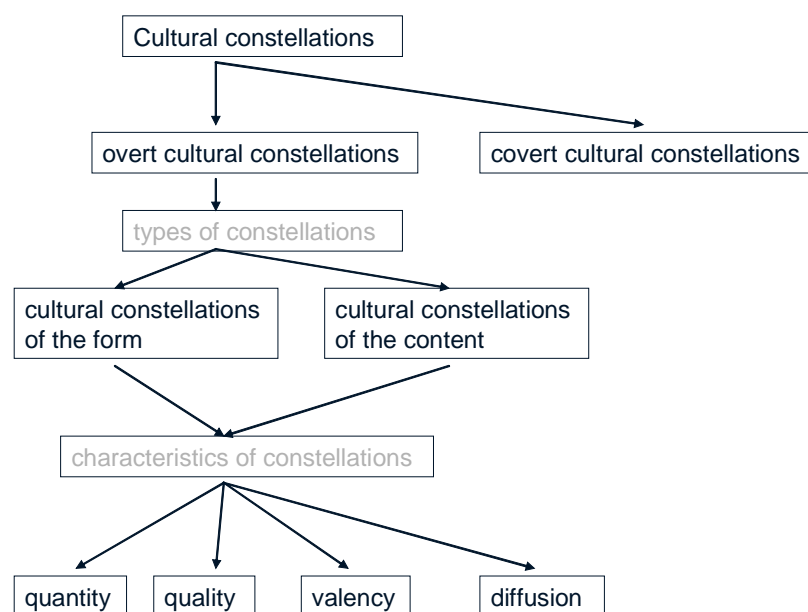


Fig. 11: Types and characteristics of cultural constellations

3 On the translation of cultural constellations in texts

The translation of cultural constellations presupposes a comparison of cultures on the SYSTEMS level, before the manifestations of culture in form of cultural constellations can be rendered into a target text on the TEXT level. A presentation of the steps in the transfer and reproduction phases will be undertaken in the following sections.⁸

3.1 The transfer phase

The steps which form the methodology needed for comparing ‘cultures’ in the transfer phase are the following:

- Step 5: *Creation of cultural systems of the target culture* according to the systems of the source culture, which were listed and structured in step 2. The structuring of the target-cultural systems follows the structuring of the source-cultural systems only to the extent possible, according to the differences displayed by the respective areas of life. The result of this step is a list of target-cultural systems, which will act as the basis of the comparison to be undertaken in the next step.
- Step 6: *Contrastive comparison* of the elements of the source-cultural systems with the elements of the target-cultural systems. Such a comparison will reveal the relationships between source- and target cultural elements. There can be (a) *complete identity*, (b) *partial identity* or (c) *non-identity* between the source- and target-cultural elements. The case (a) is a case of cultural similarity, while the cases (b) and (c) reveal a situation between the source- and target-culture that ranges from cultural difference (b) up to cultural specificity (c).
- Step 7: *Compatibility control*. In this step the elements of each cultural constellation in the source-text are checked against the elements of the respective target-cultural systems. This is again a two-tier consideration of SYSTEMS and TEXT level, as it was undertaken in the reception phase above. It is important for the cultural constellations of the source text to be checked against the respective target-cultural systems, in order to confirm their *compatibility* or *incompatibility* with target-cultural systems. The result of this step is the specification of the degree of transferability of the cultural constellations of the source text into the target-culture.

The following figure visualizes the above steps 5 – 7:

⁸ The enumeration of steps will start with step 5 to continue the enumeration of the steps in the reception phase.

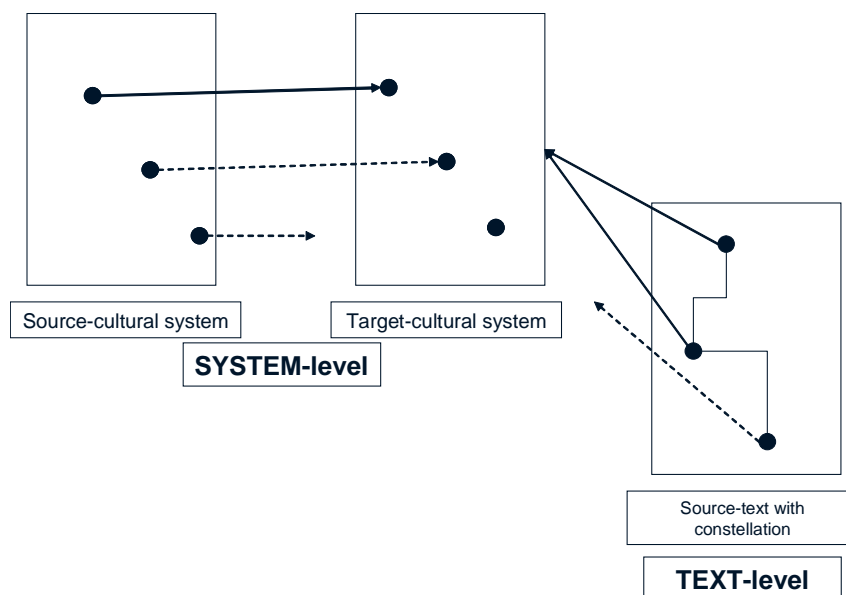


Fig. 12: Steps 5 – 7 of the method for translating cultural constellations (transfer phase)

In the above figure, the arrows pointing from elements of the source-cultural system to elements of the target-cultural system denote potential relationships (upper part of the figure). The full-line arrow stands for complete identity, the dotted-line arrow reaching an element of the target-cultural system stands for partial identity, and the dotted-line arrow not reaching the target-cultural system stands for non-identity with any target-cultural element. In the lower part of the figure, the arrows pointing from elements of the cultural constellation to elements of the target-cultural system represent the compatibility of those elements to the target-cultural system. Full-line arrows imply compatibility and the dotted-line arrow implies incompatibility. The verification of the degree of identity between source-cultural and target-cultural elements and of the degree of compatibility between source-cultural constellations and target-cultural systems fulfils the methodological prerequisite for the choice of translation procedures and the creation of a target-text in the reproduction phase.

3.2 The reproduction phase

There are two steps which complete the methodology for the identification and translation of cultural constellations in texts:⁹

- **Step 8: Translation decisions.** In this step the translator makes decisions about both compatible and incompatible elements of the source-cultural constellations in order to create target-cultural constellations in the target-text, which will function as equivalents of the respective source-cultural constellations. Compatible elements seem to be rather easily transferable to a target-cultural constellation, whereas incompatible elements present cases of cultural specifics, where the translator can choose between translation procedures which are at his/her disposal (cf. part 1.1). Nevertheless, regardless of compatibility or incompatibility, the translator should make his/her decisions on the basis of the *purpose* set for the translation. This criterion should guide the translator not only in his/her decisions about how to render the elements of a cultural constellation, but also about whether or not to render them, be they compatible or incompatible (cf. Min Sunwoo's article in this volume).

⁹ The enumeration of steps will start with step 8 to continue the enumeration of the steps in the transfer phase.

- Step 9: Creation of the target text in consideration of: *the purpose of the translation, the specific characteristics of the target audience, if known, and the norms and conventions of the target language.*

The following table summarizes the steps of the methods for the identification and translation of cultural elements in texts according to three phases and by indicating for each step the level of analysis.

Phase	Step	Process	Level of analysis
reception phase	1	First reading and activation of cultural areas of life	T
	2	Listing and structuring of source-cultural systems	T ► S
	3	Concretization of source-cultural systems	S ► T
	4	Identification and evaluation of cultural constellations	T
transfer phase	5	Structuring of target-cultural systems	S
	6	Comparison of source- and target cultural systems	S
	7	Compatibility control of cultural constellations	T ► S
reproduction phase	8	Translation decisions	S ► T
	9	Creation of target text	T

Fig. 13: Method for identifying and translating cultural constellations

The above table shows the level of analysis in the last column. T stands for TEXT level and S for SYSTEMS level. It is obvious that the method starts and ends at TEXT level, but the whole process is a constant change between TEXT- and SYSTEMS level, as many steps appear to be taken at different levels and some others appear to be presenting a level shift (represented by ►).

4 Applicability and didactic aspects

The above discussed methodology has been criticized for not being applicable, as it seems to be extremely time consuming and far too complex to be applied by translators in real situations. Another point of criticism has been that, as opposed to other methods in translation, this sequence of steps presents a rather prescriptive way of tackling cultural problems in translation, failing to stress factors such as the creativity or the talent of the translator.

As to the first point, the methodology is admittedly time consuming. However, it aims at describing in a systematic and transparent way the actions that need to be taken for the translation of ‘culture’ in texts, especially as regards student translators (and not professional ones). Student translators, who do not dispose of the necessary experience, need clear methodologies, which can explain the cognitive processes followed almost unconsciously by professionals, but which can also direct them in their efforts to acquire necessary skills. Such methodologies are inevitably time consuming and complex, at least at the beginning. The

repeated application of complex methodologies leads, though, to a kind of *internalization* after a certain time. This means that they can be followed almost automatically. Let us take a simple example: Whenever someone wants to have light in a dark room, he/she will just turn on the light switch, without spending a lot of time contemplating about how the switch functions in order to let electricity flow from the central source outside the room, through the wires to the light bulb hanging in the room. This does not mean, of course, that this person does not possess this knowledge. Nevertheless, he/she just resorts to an automatic move. Almost the same thing happens with the translation process. Professionals do not apply all methods as in the first time, in order to produce a translation of high quality. But student translators need to acquire the knowledge of how such a quality can be achieved. Through experience, they will then be capable of applying methods almost automatically, thus reducing the time they spend analyzing the source-text.

As to the second point of criticism, didactic concepts are inevitably prescriptive to a certain extent. This issue actually touches upon the question of whether translation is an art or a science. The view supported here is that translation is both art and science and that the degree to which translation is one or the other depends heavily on the text type and/or the genre translated. It is true that literary or poetic translation, for example, requires qualities on the part of the translator that are not totally subject to theoretical description, such as intuition, linguistic sensibility or the talent of expression. In these cases, one can certainly talk about translation as art, intuition or talent. In other cases, though, such as the translation of technical texts, where translation depends on more objectively describable factors, translation can justify its scientific character in a better way. However, regardless of the text type and the degree, to which translation is art or science, there will always be some sub-processes in translation, which can definitely be described systematically, such as the structuring of cultural information (cf. step 2), the concretization of cultural systems (cf. step 3), the identification of cultural constellations (cf. step 4), the contrastive comparison of cultural systems (cf. step 6) and the compatibility control (cf. step 7) in the above methodology. The above methodology also contains steps that offer free space to ability, intuition and creativity, as it is really up to the translator to recognize cultural areas of life (cf. step 1), to evaluate cultural constellations (cf. step 4), to decide upon translation procedures (cf. step 8) or reformulate the source-text into a target-text (cf. step 9). Thus it becomes clear that the above methodology is a balanced proposal of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ steps, which can function as a theoretical framework, something like a ‘canvas’, for autonomous action on the part of the translator.

5 Conclusion

The above presented and discussed sequence of steps proves useful not only as a practical guide for the translator in the sense of a methodology, but also offers a theoretical negotiation of the extremes presented by the micro- and macro-structural approaches in the translation of ‘culture’ in texts. This could be done mainly by supporting the methodological discussion with a definition of culture that offers the necessary theoretical framework for the development of a thorough and systematic methodological approach to the abstract, but ‘omnipresent’ phenomenon of culture. Hopefully, challenging the present status of things will prove fruitful for further research in the vast field of cultural translation.

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