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Universal Thought in Translation

Contents

0   Introduction

The following article is the written version of a presentation given at the MuTra 2007 Conference in Vienna. It relates selected general thought principles to translation and interpreting against the background of the ongoing controversy on translation universals and offers perspectives for future translation and interpreting research.

The selected universal thought principles are the *participant – observer* stance in research, the differentiation of *individual, collective and systems levels of description* and the *atomistic – holistic – hol-atomistic text perspectives triad*. They are here introduced and applied later in some of the articles in this volume, with respect to translating culture (Georgios Floros), to knowledge management in simultaneous interpreting (Martin Will), discourse analysis & translation (Daniel Dejica), discourse interpreting (Lihua Jiang), the translation of musical texts (Jan Kunold), website translation (Sandra Nauert), and audiodescription and translation (Bernd Benecke).

It is hoped that these applications will contribute to show the explanatory power of some of the universal thought principles and offer perspectives for further translation research.

1   Translation Universals: Problem and Phenomenon

Translation Universals is the label for a research paradigm that is motivated by the question of whether there are general regularities and methodologies in translation that are independent of the particularities of individual translations.

Proposals for translation universals are about
(a)   the relation between translations and source texts and
(b)   the relation between translations and comparable non-translations in the target language.

Potential translation universals include

- simplification (e.g. less lexical variety, lower lexical density),

- explicitation[1] and
- normalization[2]

as linguistic features[3] of a "third code" (Frawley 1984) or "translationese" Gellerstam (1986) – all textual features quantitatively accessible by the analysis of large corpora. *Translation Universals* is therefore strongly favored by corpus-based methodologies, largely pioneered by Baker in the early 90s (Baker 1993, 1995)[4], claiming that through quantitative description translation characteristics are identified that are helpful for translators.

The reasoning that statistically identified characteristics can yield data that is applicable to individual entities (e.g. translations) is a fallacy as will be shown in this paper. Corpus methodologies in general have their limitations, when qualitative criteria come into play as has been widely recognized (e.g. cohesion shifts vs. coherence, cf. Blum-Kulka 1986 and/or translator choices for or against cultural losses[5] need to be made). Other individual translation parameters come into play when the translator has to make decisions of 'intended' readership, translator's perceptions and above all the translation purpose. Such general translation determinants along with a translator's perceptions, competence and preferences cannot be accessed collectively but are highly individual categories that compromise results that are obtained by statistical analysis alone.

Critical translation researchers have therefore suggested that principles 'outside' the text need to be considered when approaching the question of translation universals. At present there are but few attempts to provide more abstract, text-'external', explanations for universal translation patterns or principles. Chesterman (2004:43) argues that theory has attempted to go beyond the particular in three different ways, from a prescriptive, critical and descriptive perspective and rightly cautions that the term 'universal' be restricted to claims that are actually hypothesized to be universal, not specific to a subset of concrete translations'. Stressing that translational behavior is affected by a vast heterogeneous array of factors, Toury prefers to speak of "laws" rather than 'universals' (Toury 1995:268) and suggests that "the whole question of translation universals is not one of existence but one of explanatory power" (Toury 2004:29).

It is in this sense that the principles of

- theoretical stance as participant – observer
- individual, collective and systems levels of description (ICS)
- atomistic-hol-atomistic-holistic text perspectives

are here presented in their translational dimension in an attempt to discuss their explanatory power and – with the subsequent doctoral dissertation synopses – to open a discussion rather than provide answers.

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[1] Vinay & Darbelnet's (1958) widely accepted definition is the process of introducing information into the target language which is present only implicitly in the source language, but which can be derived from the context or the situation.
[2] Scott (1996:112) formulated a definition of normalization as "the translator's sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious rendering of idiosyncratic text features in such a way as to make them conform to the typical textual characteristics of the target language".
[3] Laviosa (2002:43) defines translation universals as "linguistic features which typically occur in translated texts and are thought to be the almost inevitable by-products of the process of mediation between two languages rather than being the result of the interference of one language with another"
[4] The potential translation universals she identified were later further studied and confirmed and in some cases the hypotheses were rejected (Granger 2005).
[5] It is a pragmatic fact that not all that is in a source text can be translated and that translation therefore by definition always implies losses and gains, i.e. choices (cf. Nida's semiotic law of loss (1959).

2   Selected Universal Thought Principles in T & I

Two of these general translation thought principles have already been applied to translation and are available as publications, i.e. the text perspectives (simplified most recently in Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2007) in their relationship to translation methodology (e.g. Gerzymisch-Arbogast/Mudersbach 1998) and the ICS as a basis for the analysis of terms in (con)text (Gerzymisch-Arbogast 1996) and as constituting the translation concept of 'norm' (Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2003). The participant-observer (or involvement-detachment stance in research) has so far not been published in its translation dimension but it will be at the heart of Min Sunwoo's operationalization of the translation purpose (in this volume) as the clearest example of the participant stance in translation research.

2.1   Theoretical Stance: Participant or Observer?

We suggest that the differentiation of whether principles are formulated

* to be put to use (participants' view) or
* from a detached analytical onlooker's stance (observers' view)

determinates the categories and methods used for building a theory.

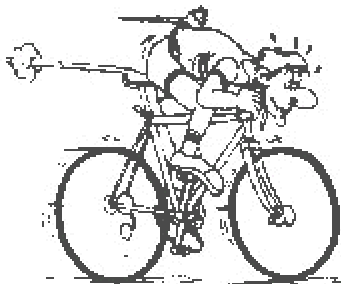For example: a bicycle can be described for a user (who is interested in riding the bike)

Fig. 1:   biker

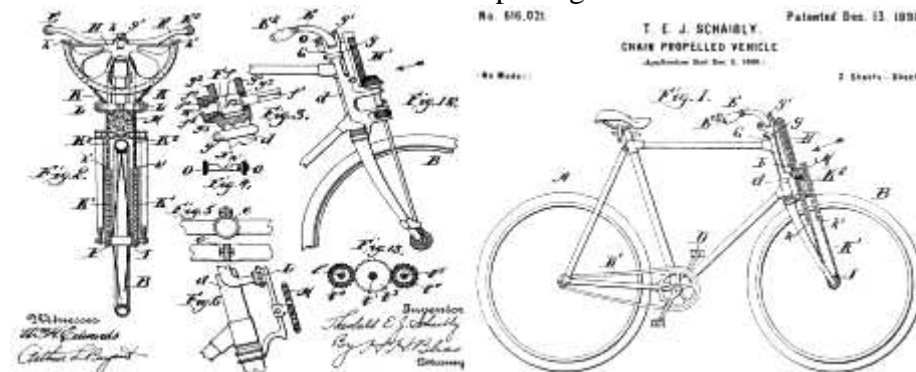or for someone interested in how it is put together.

Fig. 2:   bike assembly instruction

What information and how this information is presented is different for bicycle riders and bicycle developers or constructors. If you give the bicycle rider a list of bicycle components, she may be disappointed and not know what to do with it. If, on the other hand, you give

bicycle riding instructions to a bicycle constructor, he may feel he is 'taken for a ride' and presume he is undervalued.

In translation theory, the lack of differentiating between the 'participant's and 'observer's stance or point of view has led to the seemingly irreconcilable gap between theory and practice:

Practicing translators ('participants') are interested in how to solve a particular translation problem, e.g. translate 'culture' in texts or to produce texts according to a specific purpose and will therefore expect and appreciate a step-by-step methodology of how to proceed when faced with a particular problem. They may feel frustrated when being served a hermeneutic circle no matter how fascinatingly complex it may be. 'Observers', on the other hand, will appreciate designing a cultural system and a discussion of how it is composed for contrastive descriptions and may feel misunderstood by what to them is simply a 'how to' or 'hands-on' approach.

This problem of orienting one's theoretical thought to acting 'participants' or analytical 'observers' is at the heart of the theory – practice gap in translation and interpreting which still exists today and which so sadly prevents Translation to become a coherent discipline.

We suggest therefore that translation and interpreting research – if it wants to be useful for the practicing translator – take the 'participants' view and proceeds

- from the phenomenon, the translation problem and
- chooses a principle or model/theory that can solve the problem and
- applies the model and its methodology to solve an identified problem in a systematic, transparent, to some extent repeatable procedure, i.e. a translation-specific methodology.

The participant's stance is at the heart of all the following contributions by Bernd Benecke, Daniel Dejica, Georgios Floros, Lihua Jiang, Sandra Nauert, Min Sunwoo and Martin Will.

2.2   Individual, Collective and Systems levels of description (ICS)

The descriptive ICS model differentiates three general description levels when looking at phenomena and assumes that research questions are formulated, objects and data are analyzed and theoretical models are drafted and their adequacy tested.

These levels are:

- an individual level (I-level) on which (abstract or concrete) objects are investigated on the basis of a catalog of characteristics (parameters) with a specified range of values;
- a collective level (C-level), on which groups of (concrete and abstract) objects are statistically investigated relative to (a constellation of) parameters;
- a systems level (S-level), on which abstract objects and their characteristics are investigated. Objects under investigation on the systems level are non-existent as phenomena and are thus not accessible empirically.

The ICS is thus a more differentiated model that de Saussure's tripartite model of langue-parole-langage and operationalizes related models formulated by Coseriu ([3]1979:45-59) and Heger ([2]1976:26) in that (1) the ICS extends not only to language but to phenomena and their description in general (2) not only the individual levels but also their interrelationships are described (as 'transitions') and restrictions ('fallacies)' are formulated and (3) their added value for the formulation of a model or theory is specified depending on the research questioning and the results to be expected.

The description levels within the ICS model are not isolated levels, which are confined in themselves but allow for interrelationships through so-called transitions. Transitions between these levels are possible but subject to certain conditions (cf. Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2003) if fallacies are to be avoided. The selection of the level on which a scientific question is to be analysed depends on the kind of objects under investigation, on the research questioning or research objective and on the results to be expected. Correspondingly, the transitions between the three levels are qualified as either constructive (i.e. yielding manifest results), pseudo-transitions (i.e. yielding no manifest results, only seemingly offer solutions to research problems) and/or fallacies (i.e. implying flaws in logical thinking and reasoning, and lead to false conclusions).

The following overview shows the ICS and the transitions it identifies and describes:
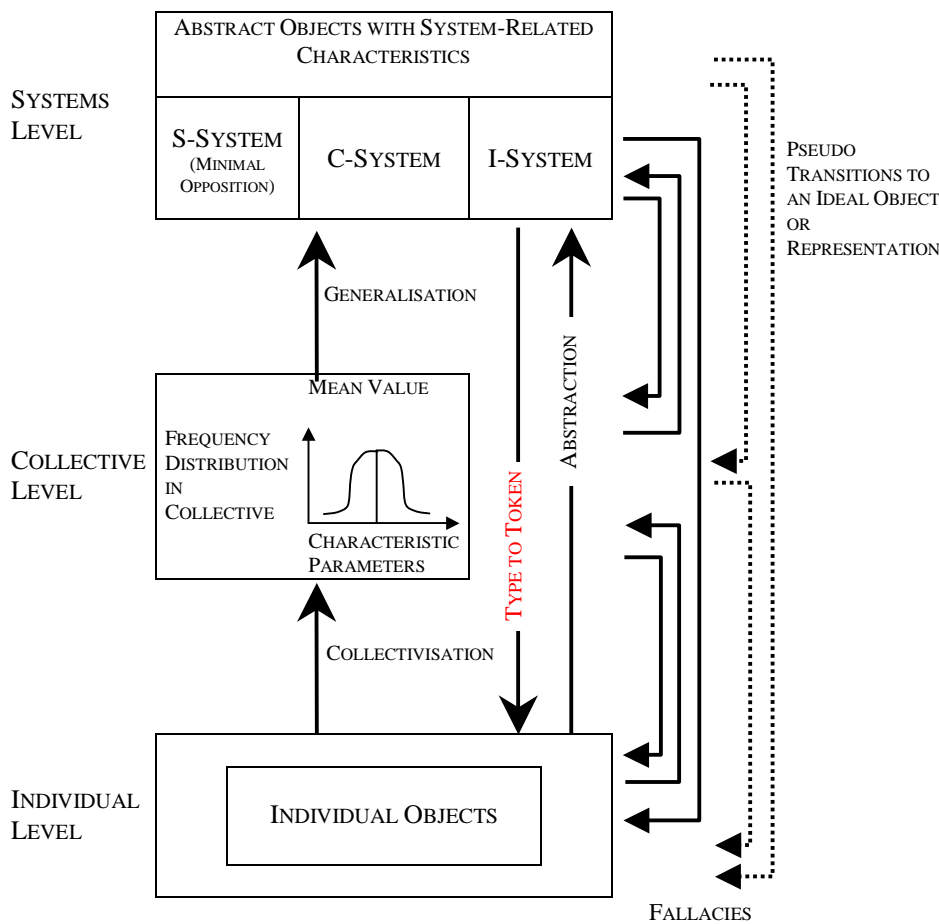

Fig. 3:   The ICS model

	CONSTRUCTIVE TRANSITIONS				PSEUDO TRANSITIONS			FALLACIOUS TRANSITIONS							
	Collectivisation	Generalisation	Abstraction	Re-Distribution I-Type	Ideal Collective	Collective Individual	Ideal Individual	Re-Collectivisation	Re-Individualisation	Re-Distribution S-Type	Re-Distribution C-Type	Fallacious Projection of Statistical Distribution to the	Individual Collectivisation	Individual Projection to Systems Level	Phenomenisation of a Macro-Construct
SYSTEMS LEVEL		↑	↑	●	●		●	●		●		↑		↑	●
COLLECTIVE LEVEL	↑	●		⫽	●	⟋	⫽	●	●	⫽	●	●	↑	⫽	⫽
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	●		●	↓	⫽	↓			⫽	↓	⫽		●	●	↓

Fig. 4   Overview of transitions between the three levels

While we cannot in this paper show and discuss the scope of the ICS in detail[6], there is one that is interesting from the point of discussing translation universals. The relevant transitions here are those of collectivization and generalization and the related fallacies involving the levels as depicted in Fig. 4).

COLLECTIVISATION: The process of collectivization involves the transition from the individual level of description (I-level) to the collective level of description (C-level) of a collective as a basis of the investigation. This collective is formed by a set established on the I-level by individual objects with identical values (= collective). The thus established collective is then statistically investigated, yielding significant frequencies for certain parameters.

However, this transition is accompanied by a loss of information. If a collective is formed via the transition of collectivization, this process will result in an anonymization of objects. This means that the process of statistical analysis implies that the individual parameters are no longer available for further analysis.

By anonymizing the objects via collectivization,

- the corresponding individual objects are no longer available, i.e.
- from the results of a statistical analysis no conclusions can be drawn with respect to the individual parameters of the individual objects in the collective
  (= fallacy of-re-individualization).[7]

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[6] The ICS is described in German in Storrer (1992) and Gerzymisch-Arbogast (1996). A shortened English description can be found in Gerzymisch-Arbogast (2003).

[7] The transition of collectivization involves the individual level of (abstract or concrete) objects which are analysed according to a catalogue of parameters (with a certain range of values). These parameter values must be different from object to object (= individualizing parameters) but may show the same parameter value in all objects (= characterizing parameters). Individual objects within the same parameter range form a collective which differs from the extensional individual set of objects on the I-level in that the objects in the collective are 'anonymized' within the transition of collectivization, i.e. when they are statistically investigated relative to a collective analyzing parameter.

Note that while the objects in the collective may still be individually accessible (for each object the parameter values are statistically investigated), the identity of the objects, their individual identifiability (via individualizing parameter values) is, however, not relevant for the statistical investigation and is therefore not longer accessible.

An example may help to illustrate the procedure: In Germany, the Bureau of Statistics conducts an investigation of the population with respect to certain parameters, among them family size, number of children, income level, etc. People are grouped together according to whether they have a family or are single. Those who have a family form a collective which can now be statistically investigated using a collective-analyzing parameter.

GENERALIZATION: The process of generalization involves the transition from the collective level of description (C-level) to the systems level of description (S-level) and yields a C-Type on the systems level. The C-Type is established via a statistically investigated collective of objects as the parameter values of the collective are attributed to the C-Type as inherent C-Type value(s) on the systems level.
This procedure of generalization implies again a loss of information:
- The information on the range of deviation and the size of the collective is lost because it is not transported to the systems level (= fallacy of re-collectivisation).
- By the same token no information about the parameter values on the I-level can be retrieved (= fallacy of re-distribution of an S-Type).

The transition of individual collectivization is fallacious, because
- it identifies individual parameters of objects (which on the I-level are still available but which are anonymized within the process of collectivization) with collective parameters and
- considers them 'representative' for a group of 'similar' individuals. The notions of 'representative' and 'similarity' are problematic, because 'representativeness' is not justified and 'similar' cannot be substantiated by parameters.

In contrast to the constructive transition of generalization, which projects only the mean value to the systems level, the projection of the entire frequency distribution of the statistical analysis to the systems level is not useful on a systems level since a C-Type for a specified parameter can only take one value as the 'normal' case and not the entire deviation range of values which appear with a certain frequency (fallacy of projection of the statistical distribution to the systems level).

This fallacy leads to the assumption that concepts, e.g. the concept of meaning can be 'vague' or 'prototypical' on the systems level.

Within the transition of generalization, the mean value of a distribution relative to a collective-analysing parameter is generalized, i.e. is projected to the C-Type as its inherent feature.

Note that the statistical mean of the normal distribution curve changes its status on the systems level: It is no longer a value in a range of (dis)continuous values (for individual objects) but a discrete inherent value of the 'macro-object' on the systems level in opposition to other inherent values of comparable macro-objects on the systems level. The deviation and the number of statistically investigated objects are no longer accessible.

With respect to our example above, it can be assumed that the mean value of the statistical investigation of the collective-analysing parameter 'number of children' is 1.3 for the collective-forming-parameter 'family'. Projected to the S-level, this means that a German family with 1.3 children can be contrasted with a Spanish family with 2.4 children, both 'standards' are C-types on the S-level but were constructed on the basis of different collectives. However, the C-Type can no longer provide information on the size of the

collective (number of families investigated) and the number of families with 2 children (= fallacy of re-collectivisation). Still less can be said about the actual number of children in an individual family (= fallacy of re-distribution of an S-Type) nor can we find the ideal German family of the 1.3 standard as an individual object, it is only a value of a macro-object.

> **With respect to translation universals we can now substantiate our earlier argument in that its claims to yield individual translation characteristics from corpora analysis implies the fallacy of reindividualization and can thus not be upheld.**

This then indeed raises the question of the explanatory power of 'translation universals' if obtained from statistically obtained characteristics of large analyses of corpora.

The ICS Model is applied to the concept of valency (Storrer 1992), to terms in context (Gerzymisch-Arbogast 1996) and to the concept of translational norm (Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2003).

2.3   Text Perspectives

The third general thought principle we will advance and discuss here in its relation to translation is the principle of looking at texts to be translated from different perspectives and integrating these perspectives to an overall view of looking at texts and translations. This is the most widely documented and applied general principle discussed within this framework (e.g. Mudersbach 1991, Gerzymisch-Arbogast/Mudersbach 1998, Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2007 a, b) and suggests three perspectives for looking at texts form different angles and integrating them to allow for an overall understanding of texts (and translations):

1.   an **atomistic perspective** that views only individual components of a text put together to form the structure of a text, e.g. words like Lego components which form a structure or system,
2.   a **hol-atomistic perspective** that takes the individual components further into the text and looks at their informational strings or semantic clusters and
3.   a **holistic perspective** which looks at holistic 'Gestalt' phenomena, implied background knowledge, cultural attitudes and values in a text.

These perspectives lead to different translation methodologies, i.e. *Aspectra*, *Relatra* and *Holontra*:

Analysis on the atomistic level accounts for 'atomistic', i.e. smallest individual text features, and may include all textual phenomena (from typographical idiosyncrasies, explicitness of reference, metaphorical diversity and/or cultural implications) that do not develop into more complex textual dimensions. They are identified, listed and systematized as text 'aspects' with different 'values' and correlated with respective text segments. The resulting aspective matrix allows for transparency of an individual reading and interpretation of a text in its atomistic dimension.

Visualization is by matrix form.

Aspekte / Textstellen	1. Terminologie 1.1 Vorhanden 1.2 Nicht-vor-handen	2. Syntax 2.1 Nominalisie-rungen 2.2 Verbalkon-struktionen	3. Kohärenz 3.1 mit Inferenz-ziehung 3.2 ohne Infe-renzziehung	4. Begriffs-einführung 4.1 direkt 4.2 indirekt	5. Autor-Leser-Verhältnis 5.1 inhaltsbe-zogen 5.2 leserbezogen	6. Sprecher-indikatoren 6.1 vorhanden 6.2 nicht vorhan-den
0. Transactions Demand	1.1	—	3.1	—	5.1	6.2
1. People and firms need money as a transactions medium	1.1	2.1	3.1	—	5.2	6.2
2. Households need money to buy groceries and to pay for electricity and fuel bills as well as occasional large consumer durables.	1.1	2.2	3.2	—	5.2	6.2
3. Firms need money to pay for materials and labor.	1.2	2.2	3.2	—	5.2	6.2
4. These elements constitute the *transactions demand for money.*	1.1	—	3.1	4.2	5.1	6.2
5. We can illustrate the mechanics of the transactions demand for money in Fig.16-2.	1.1	2.1	3.2	—	5.2	6.2
6. This figure shows the average money holdings of a family that earns $ 1000 per month, keeps it in money, and spends it all evenly over the month.	1.1	2.2	3.1	—	5.2	6.2
7. Clearly, the family holds $ 500 on average in money balances.	1.1	—	3.2	—	5.2	6.1

Fig. 5:   Visualization by matrix form

Analysis on the holistic and most complex description level accounts for 'gestalt' phenomena in individual texts and structures them as (implied) holistic systems (holons) of knowledge, culture and/or values ('constellations', Floros 2003). It is generally recognized that understanding texts requires world knowledge in interaction with what is verbalized in the text. This interaction is made transparent by relating system and text in the form of 'concretizations' which allow for identifying individual (coherence-establishing) inferences and transparency of interpretations of a text.

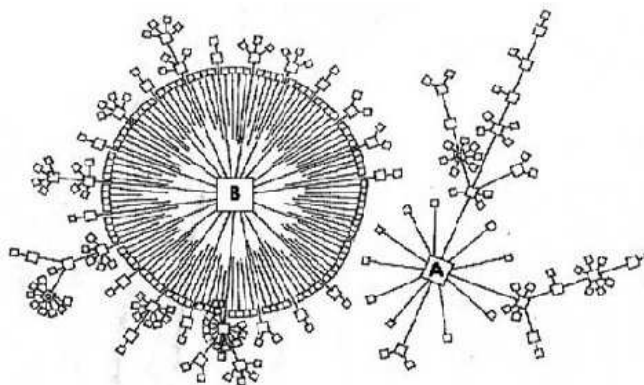Representation and visualization is by thesaurus or semantic networks.

Fig. 6:   Visualization by thesaurus or semantic networks

The hol-atomistic level 'mediates' between the atomistic and holistic levels. Analysis on a hol-atomistic level identifies features in texts that extend from the isolated atomistic unit to a more complex dimension in the context of the text as a whole. Examples are the (linearity or digression of) information structures (theme-rheme analysis) or the quality and complexity of isotopic patterns.
Representation and visualization is by semantic networks (see Fig. 6).

The three text perspectives can be illustrated with Eco's famous 'coffee example' in *Experiences in translation*[8]*,* when he suggests:

> Consider these two sentences, one from an Italian novel, the other from an American one: 'Ordinai un caffé, lo buttai giù in un secondo ed uscii dal bar' (literally, 'I ordered a coffee, swilled it down in a second and went out of the bar'); and 'He spent half an hour with the cup in his hands, sipping his coffee and thinking of Mary'.
> (Eco 2001:18).

Eco argues that culture cannot be translated because

> The first sentence can only refer to an Italian coffee and to an Italian bar, since an American coffee cannot be swallowed in a second both because of its quantity and of its temperature. The second sentence cannot refer to an Italian subject (…) because it presupposes a large cup containing what seems like gallons of coffee.
> (Eco 2001:18).

As professional translators and translation researchers we could answer that his example can very well be translated – from different perspectives;

1. from a componential perspective: we can look at coffee in its substance (as instant coffee and/or espresso)
2. from a pattern perspective we can look at the collocation of 'coffee' (i.e. 'swilled it down' versus 'sipping his coffee and thinking of Mary'), which would tell us whether to render 'instant' or 'espresso'.

The dimension that Eco probably has in mind though is

3. the holistic dimension, i.e. the implied cultural knowledge dimension of how coffee is consumed in different settings and societies reflecting different cultural values.

The holistic perspective is, as we can see, implied but is interrelated with the other perspectives. A translation therefore, could possibly reflect only one or all three perspectives depending on which perspective is chosen for the individual translator within the framework of a set translation purpose.

3 Applications in Multidimensional Translation

Looking at translations with these three general thought principles in mind can be applied to a great variety of text and translation types (literature, music, film, LSP, non-linear websites and interpreting in all its forms), incorporating such descriptive standards as lexical & syntactic idiosyncrasies, informational development, meaning types, levels and clusters & coherence, as well as holistic portrayals of background (cultural) knowledge and underlying strata of values and sense. Some examples will be presented in the articles of this volume which have all evolved from dissertation projects at Saarland University. The relationship to the three general thought principles discussed above will be briefly summarized as follows:

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[8] Eco, Umberto (1999/2001): *Experiences in Translation.* Translated by Alastair McEwen. Toronto - Buffolo - London: University of Toronto Press.

1. All articles in this volume are based on the participant's stance, meaning that all notions developed and applied here are written with the objective of eventually providing a step-by-step methodology for translators and/or interpreters.
2. The ICS Modell is at the heart of Martin Will's development of a terminological knowledge unit and its application to simultaneous interpretation.[9]
3. The text perspectives provide the basis for operationalizing the translation purpose (Min Sunwoo) and for translating websites (Sandra Nauert). Within this general three-dimensional thought principle, the atomistic and holistic perspectives are interrelated in the strategy of translating culture (Georgios Floros) and music (Kunold 2006) and in treating audiodescription as translation (Bernd Benecke).

We hope that these works will show the explanatory power of general thought principles in translation and interpreting.

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[9] It has also been applied to the valency concept in Storrer (1992), to terminological contaminations in Gerzymisch-Arbogast (1996) and to the concept of norm in Gerzymisch-Arbogast (2003).

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