Discourse and the translator

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Contents

General Editor's Preface viii
Foreword xi
Acknowledgements xiii
Standard Abbreviations xiv

1. **Issues and Debates in Translation Studies**

Process and Product p.3; Objectivity/Subjectivity p.4; 'Literal' vs 'Free' p.5; Formal and Dynamic Equivalence p.7; Form versus Content: The Translation of Style p.8; Redefinition of Style p.9; Meaning Potential p.10; 'Empathy' and Intent p.11; The Translator's Motivation p.12; Poetic Discourse: A Test Case for Translatability p.13; 'Laws' of Translation p.15; Author-centred and Reader-centred Translating p.16; Conditions of Production p.20

2. **Linguistics and Translators: Theory and Practice**

The Translator at Work p.21; Human and Machine Translation: Actual and Virtual Problems p.22; Structure vs Meaning p.25; Contrasts between Language Systems p.26; Pronouns of Address: A Problem of Structural Contrast p.27; Is Translation Impossible? p.29; The Language-and-Mind Approach p.31; Socio-cultural Context p.32; Current Trends: Intentions and Understanding p.33

3. **Context in Translating: Register Analysis**

Malinowski: Contexts of Situation and Culture p.36; Firth: Meaning and Language Variation p.37; Situational Description p.38; The Notion of Register p.38; User-related Variation p.39; Geographical Dialects p.40; Temporal Dialect p.41; Social Dialect p.42; Standard Dialect p.42; Idiolect p.43; Use-related Variation p.45; Field of Discourse p.48; Mode of Discourse p.49; Tenor of Discourse p.50; The Inherent Fuzziness of Registers p.51; Restricted Registers p.53

4. **Translating and Language as Discourse**

Beyond Register p.55; The Three Dimensions of Context p.57; The Pragmatic Dimension p.59; Speech Acts p.60; The Cooperative Principle and Gricean Maxims p.62; Negotiating Meaning in Translation p.64; Communicative, Pragmatic and Semiotic Interplay p.65; The Semiotic Dimension p.67; Inter-Semiotic Transfer p.69; Generic Constraints p.69; Discoursal Constraints p.70; Textual Constraints p.73; Pragmatics and Semiotics of Register p.75

5. **Translating Text as Action: The Pragmatic Dimension of Context**

Illocutionary Structure p.76; Text Acts p.78; Empirical Analysis p.79; Illocutionary Force in Context p.82; Power and Status p.86; Interpretation and Inference p.92; Effectiveness and Efficiency in Translation p.93; Relevance p.95; Quality, Relevance and the Translation of Irony p.97

6. **Translating Texts as Signs: The Semiotic Dimension of Context**

From Pragmatics to Semiotics p.101; Semiotics-conscious Translating p.104; The Semiotic Entity as a Unit of Translation p.105; The Sign – A Developmental History p.107; De Saussure p.107; Peirce p.108; Barthes and Myth p.111; Connotation and Denotation p.112; Basic Assumptions of Semiotics p.114; Semiotics in Translating – a Synthesis p.116

7. **Intertextuality and Intentionality**

Intertextuality: Allusion and Reference p.120; Approaches to Intertextuality p.121; The Intertextual Chain p.121; Active and Passive Intertextuality p.123; Types of Intertextual Reference p.125; Mediation p.127; What Intertextuality is Not p.128; Contratextuality p.130; A Typology p.132; Recognition and Transfer of Intertextual Reference p.133; Summary p.137

8. **Text Type as the Translator's Focus**

Text Act in Interaction p.139; Text in Relation to Discourse and Genre p.140; Standards of Textuality p.144; Rhetorical Purpose p.145; Dominant Contextual Focus p.145; The Hybrid Nature of Texts p.146; Text-type Focus p.149; Macro-text Processing p.150; Micro-text Processing p.151; The Argumentative Text Type p.153; The Expository Text Type p.154; The Instructional

Text Type p.156; The Psychological Reality of Text Types p.159; Ideology, Text Type and Translation p.160

9. **Prose Designs: Text Structure in Translation**
Principles of Composition p.165; How Context Influences the Structure of Texts p.168; Contextual Configuration p.170; Limits of Structure Modification p.171; How Elements are Grouped into Sequences p.173; Perceiving Boundaries between Sequences p.175; Topic Shift p.177; Perceiving Text as a Unit of Structure p.178; Equivalence: Word Level or Text Level p.180; Basic Text Designs p.181; Putting Text Designs to Use in Summarising p.185; Texts in Relation to Discourse p.186; Limits of the Translator's Freedom p.187; Issues for the Translator p.190

10. **Discourse Texture**
'Form' and 'Content' p.192; Texture as Motivated Choice p.193; Coherence as Intended Meaning p.194; Standards of Textuality p.195; Systems Contrasts p.195; Inference p.197; Recurrence and Co-reference p.199; Partial Recurrence p.200; Pro-forms and Ellipsis p.201; Collocation p.204; Junction and Inter-Propositional Coherence p.205; Explicit and Implicit Relations p.207; Theme and Rheme in Translation p.209; Thematisation: Functional Sentence Perspective p.212; Communicative Dynamism p.213; Information Systems: Given–New Information p.215; Predictability and Recoverability p.215; Saliency p.215; Shared Assumptions p.216; Assumed Familiarity p.217; Thematic Progression p.217; Theme–Rheme in relation to Genre and Discourse p.220; Texture – A Final Word p.222

11. **The Translator as Mediator**
Two Kinds of Mediation p.223; Reader Assumptions and Expectations p.227; Selecting between Options p.228; Interaction of Signs within the Text p.229; Interaction with other Texts p.230; Problems of Cohesion p.231; Thematic Progression p.234; Conclusions – The Translator at Work p.236

Glossary of Terms p.239
List of Texts Quoted p.245
Bibliography p.247
Index p.254

THREE

Context in translating: register analysis

Against the background described in Chapter 2, a new approach developed by Michael Halliday and his colleagues in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s provided translation studies with an alternative view which approached language as text. Halliday (1971: 331) explains what this approach involves:

> By a functional theory of language I mean one which attempts to explain linguistic structure, and linguistic phenomena, by reference to the notion that language plays a certain part in our lives; that it is required to serve certain universal types of demand.

This social theory of language, known as the **systemic-functional** model, owes its existence to a variety of sources. Basically, however, two sets of insights from anthropology and linguistics were particularly influential. The first of these comes from the work of Malinowski (1923, 1935) and the second from that of Firth (e.g. 1935).

MALINOWSKI: CONTEXTS OF SITUATION AND CULTURE

From our point of view, it is perhaps a striking coincidence that Malinowski's theory of context was originally developed with the translator in mind. Working with people who belonged to a remote culture (Melanesian peoples in the Trobriand Islands of the Western Pacific), Malinowski had to face the problem of how to interpret it for the English-speaking reader. The problem became one of translation since the cultures concerned were studied through their emergence in texts (oral tradition, narration of fishing expeditions, etc.). What was the best method for portraying these texts in English: free translation, literal translation or translation with commentary? Free translation would be intelligible but convey no cultural insights. Literal translation, on the other hand, superficially preserves the original but would be unintelligible to the English reader. In consequence, Malinowski opted for translation with commentary.

What the extended commentary did was to 'situationalise' the text by relating it to its environment, both verbal and non-verbal. Malinowski referred to this as the **context of situation**, including the totality of the culture surrounding the act of text production and reception. He believed the cultural context to be crucial in the interpretation of the message, taking in a variety of factors ranging from the ritualistic (which assumes great importance in traditional societies), to the most practical aspects of day-to-day existence.

FIRTH: MEANING AND LANGUAGE VARIATION

A colleague of Malinowski at London University, J. R. Firth, maintained that the study of meaning was the *raison d'être* of linguistics and that it should be viewed in terms of 'function' in 'context'. In other words, the meaning of an utterance has to do with what the utterance is intended to achieve, rather than merely the sense of the individual words. This view of language built on some of the notions expounded by Malinowski, such as those of situation and culture. Context of situation could now include participants in speech events, the action taking place, other relevant features of the situation and the effects of the verbal action. These variables are amenable to linguistic analysis and are therefore useful in making statements about meaning.

Firth (1951) proposes a number of levels of meaning, each of which has its own contribution to make and confronts the translator with particular problems: phonological, grammatical, collocational and situational. It is in terms of these levels of meaning that, for Firth, the limits of translatability are to be found. For example, in translating certain types of verse (Firth takes the example of Swinburne), the lower modes of phonetics and phonology present insurmountable problems, leading to commonly heard statements that poetry is untranslatable. But, as Gregory (1980) suggests, Firth is merely indicating the limits of translatability in the strict sense of the word, as opposed to recommending that no attempt should be made to translate a text where one mode of meaning proves to be problematical.

SITUATIONAL DESCRIPTION

Under the influence of Firth and Malinowski, description of **communicative events** is now fairly widely recognised as a proper goal of linguistic analysis. These events are as amenable to sociologically conscious linguistic description as any other kind of data. In fact, as Gregory (1967: 178) points out,

> The difference between situational and other kinds of linguistic description has been greatly exaggerated. Much of the absence. . . of development of contextual and situational statement has been due to what might be termed a remarkable failure of nerve, a fear as to what is a describable relevant situational feature, a situational 'fact'.

But what can be said to constitute a relevant set of situational features? Naturally, criteria of relevance vary. As we have seen in Chapter 2, linguists, applied linguists and translation theorists have different interpretations of what has to be described. In translation studies, for example, a systematic description of the translating process is a priority. Translators, for their part, have long been aware of the role of situational factors (source, status, client, use to be made of translation, etc.); it was only in linguistics that the realisation was slow to come about.

THE NOTION OF REGISTER

Catford (1965: 83) neatly expresses the point of view of translation theorists who have addressed themselves to the question of text context:

> The concept of a 'whole language' is so vast and heterogeneous that it is not operationally useful for many linguistic purposes, descriptive, comparative, and pedagogical. It is therefore desirable to have a framework of categories for the classification of 'sub-languages' or varieties within a total language.

So what determines variation in language use? We can approach this problem in terms of several different dimensions: the medium by which language is transmitted (phonic, graphic), formal patterning (lexico-grammatical arrangement), and situational significance (relevant extra-linguistic features).

Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964) recommend a framework for the description of language variation. Two dimensions are recognised. One has to do with the user in a particular language event: who (or what) the speaker/writer is. User-related varieties (Corder 1973) are called **dialects** which, while capable of displaying differences at all levels, differ from person to person primarily in the phonic medium. The second dimension relates to the use to which a user puts language. Use-related varieties are known as **registers** and, unlike dialects, differ from each other primarily in language form (e.g. grammar and lexis). For example, the distinction between

(1) I hereby declare the meeting open

and

(2) Shall we make a start now?

is use-related. On the other hand, the difference in voice quality or the way a particular vowel is pronounced when (1) and (2) are uttered by an Australian, an American or an Englishman is one of phonic medium and is, therefore, user-related.

USER-RELATED VARIATION

Depending on the user, language varies in several respects. We shall here distinguish idiolectal, geographical, temporal, social and standard/non-standard variation. These are represented in Fig. 3.1.

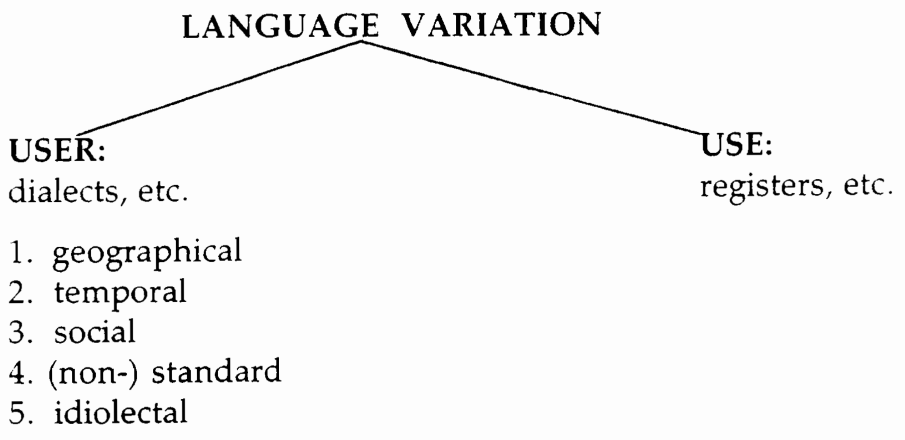


Figure 3.1 The use–user distinction

Geographical dialects

Language varieties correspond to geographical variation, giving rise to different geographical dialects. It should be noted that demarcation lines between regional varieties are drawn not always on linguistic grounds but often in the light of political or cultural considerations (e.g. the situation of Dutch *vis-à-vis* German, where a geographical boundary based on linguistic considerations alone would be difficult to determine). Another misconception surrounding geographical variation is that a given variety has the same status throughout the area where it is spoken (e.g. the notion that only one variety of English is used in, say, southern England). The dynamics of geographical variation are too complex to pigeonhole neatly; the notion of a 'continuum' with inevitable overlaps may be necessary for a better understanding not only of geographical variation but of other types of dialect as well.

An awareness of geographical variation, and of the ideological and political implications that it may have, is therefore essential for translators and interpreters. Accent, for example, is one of the more recognisable features of geographical variation and is often a source of problems. We recall the controversy in Scotland a few years ago over the use of Scottish accents in representing the speech of Russian peasants in TV dramatisation of a foreign play. The inference was allowed that a Scottish accent might somehow be associated with low status, something which, no doubt, was not intended. Like producers and directors, translators have to be constantly alert to the social implications of their decisions. The representation in a ST of a particular dialect creates an inescapable problem: which TL dialect to use? In Molière's *Dom Juan*, the speech of Pierrot is made to resemble that of the *patois* of the Ile-de-France, as in Text $3A_1$.

Text $3A_1$

> Aga, quien, Charlotte, je m'en vas te conter tout fin drait comme cela est venu; car, comme dit l'autre, je les ai le premier avisés, avisés le premier je les ai. . .

One English translator offers 'a synthetic west country alternative. . . with suitable diffidence' (Molière 1953: xxvii), as in Text $3A_2$.

Text $3A_2$

> Lookee, Lottie, I can tell 'ee just 'ow it did come about. 'Twas me as clapped eyes on 'em first in a manner o' speak'n'; first to clap eyes on 'em, I be. . .

One can understand the translator's reluctance: why West Country? How synthetic? The extent of these problems may be appreciated by comparison to another translation (Molière 1929: 14), given in Text $3A_3$.

Text $3A_3$

> Eye, marry, Charlotta, I'se tell thee autright haw it fell aut; for, as the zaying iz, I spied 'um aut ferst, ferst I spied 'um aut. . .

The difficulty of achieving dialectal equivalence in translation will be apparent to anyone who has translated for the stage. Rendering ST dialect by TL standard has the disadvantage of losing the special effect intended in the ST, while rendering dialect by dialect runs the risk of creating unintended effects (cf. the discussion of Text 3C below). At a more general level, sensitivity to the various accents and lexico-grammatical features of different geographical dialects is the hallmark of the competent interpreter at international conferences. Whereas training for non-native speakers often focuses on the Received Pronunciation (RP) variety of English, speeches in international conferences may display features of Australian English, Nigerian English, Indian English, etc.; interpreter training programmes need to reflect this dialectal diversity of English.

Temporal dialect

Temporal dialects reflect language change through time. Each generation has its own linguistic fashions, and, whereas change is generally imperceptible, one has only to read a pre-war advertising text to measure the extent of this diversity. Terms such as 'ghetto-blaster' and 'video nasties' define a text as a product of the 1980s. Such recent coinages may constitute a translation problem particularly if dictionaries (monolingual and bilingual) are not keeping pace with current usage. Translators of texts from earlier times encounter considerable problems to do with the use of either archaic language or the modern idiom in their target text. In literary translation, there is the added consideration of aesthetic effect. In Text 3B, taken from *Macbeth*, the lexical item *petty* is potentially a problem.

Text 3B

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
>
> (*Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V)

The problem can be one of comprehension because *petty* is intended in the sense of 'slow' and not 'trivial' as in current temporal dialect. However, one Arabic translator, despite recognising the intended sense and preserving the referential meaning of 'slow', ran into another problem. He selected *batii'* which is restricted to the Modern Standard and therefore jars with the aesthetic effect achieved by the rest of the text. The item *wa'iid* ('unhurried', 'slow'), on the other hand, would have successfully preserved both the reference and the aesthetic values of Classical Arabic.

Social dialect

In addition to the geographical and the temporal dimensions, social differentiation is also reflected in language. Social dialects emerge in response to social stratification within a speech community. As translators and interpreters, we are here up against problems of comprehensibility with ideological, political and social implications. Principles of equivalence demand that we attempt to relay the full impact of social dialect, including whatever discoursal force it may carry. Yet liaison interpreters working with interlocutors of vastly differing social status (e.g. barrister and accused person) find themselves tempted to neutralise social dialect in translation for the sake of improved mutual comprehension, and to avoid appearing patronising. But how far can the interpreter legitimately go in attenuating the ideological significance of social dialect? The implications of issues such as these will occupy us in Chapters 5 and 6.

Standard dialect

Range of intelligibility is defined in terms of the distinction between 'standard' and 'non-standard' dialect. Although the notion of 'standard/non-standard' is a function of prestige, like social dialect, it should not be understood as implying any linguistic value judgement. Nor is the prevalence of standards simply a question of statistics (minority, majority, etc.). Rather, the way a standard evolves is a complex process which is enhanced or hindered by factors such as education and the mass media. In understanding and describing standards/non-standards, it is, therefore, important to take into consideration functional variation and the way this finds expression in language. In situations where two or more codes coexist in a speech community, code switching is not random and the translator or interpreter, like all language users, must be able to recognise the question of 'identity' involved. For example, when non-standard forms of language are used in advertising to promote a product, identification with the values of a particular social group or class is being evoked.

Finally, it is of course the case that these user-related varieties overlap considerably. Let us take the case of Arabic, where there is a 'standard' or literary dialect which varies only slightly from one region to another or from one period to another. This 'classical' standard is chosen as the target dialect when the source text happens to be in a standard dialect too. But how does the translator into Arabic cope when the source text is in a non-standard dialect (for example, Cockney in *Pygmalion*)? Catford (1965: 87–8) offers one general solution to this kind of problem:

> the criterion here is the 'human' or 'social' geographical one. . . rather than a purely locational criterion.

Thus, the equivalence in the translation of *Pygmalion* into Arabic will be established functionally. The aim will be to bring out the user's social/linguistic 'stigma', not necessarily by opting for a particular regional variety but by modifying the standard itself. The user's status may have to be reflected not primarily through phonological features but through non-standard handling of the grammar or deliberate variation of the lexis in the target language. The same solution could well apply to the Molière example quoted in Texts 3A$_{1,2,3}$.

Idiolect

An important aspect of user-related variation, which clearly illustrates the overlap between the different varieties, is the individuality of a text user, or **idiolect**. It has to do with 'idiosyncratic' ways of using language – favourite expressions, different pronunciations of particular words as well as a tendency to over-use specific syntactic structures. Although it is difficult to isolate and describe these idiolectal differences on the basis of, say, one text or a single encounter, the uniqueness of an individual's speech represents an important aspect of language variation in general. In fact, idiolectal variation subsumes features from all the other aspects of variety discussed above: temporal, geographical, social, etc. This conforms to the notion that all types of variation may be viewed in terms of a 'continuum', with features from the several areas of variation in constant interaction.

The question for the translator is: since idiolects are normally on the margin of situationally relevant variation, is it necessary or possible to translate them? But if variation within any given domain of linguistic activity is systematic (and we believe it is), much more than the actual descriptive label for a given instance of variation is involved. One's idiolectal use of language is not unrelated to one's choice of which standard, geographical, social or temporal dialects to use. It is also linked to the purpose of the utterance and will ultimately be found to carry socio-cultural significance. Thus, in the French original of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir's idiolect is marked by a predilection for the subjunctive mood and for the occasional use of third-person forms of address (*Peut-on savoir où Monsieur a passé la nuit? Monsieur a des exigences à faire valoir?*). The exaggerated formality of these devices contrasts strongly with the tramp's physical condition and is a significant feature of his character.

The important status accorded to idiolects is recognised by O'Donnell and Todd (1980: 62), who posit the notion of idiolect as the basis of a distinction between dialect and style:

> 'dialect', as the kind of variety which is found between idiolects, and 'style' as the kind of variety found within idiolects.

Thus, the ways in which various individuals pronounce 'round the twist', for example, are dialectal variations, whereas an individual's use of 'round the twist' as opposed to 'peculiar' or 'eccentric' is to be accounted for in terms of 'style'. This notion of style identifies the kind of variation occurring within a given idiolect and not between idiolects. Politicians make subtle and conscious use of colloquialisms for particular effects. Thus, when Neil Kinnock, leader of the British Labour Party, uses in a speech the expression 'off his trolley', it would be important for an interpreter to identify this not as a feature of Kinnock's idiolect but rather as a conscious stylistic choice aimed at producing a particular effect.

We can now summarise the relevance of user-related varieties to translating by means of a real example. Text 3C contains utterances of the game-keeper, Mellors, in D. H. Lawrence (1960).

Text 3C

> 'Tha mun come ter th' cottage one time', he said. . . 'Ah mun ta'e th' lantern', he said. 'The'll be nob'dy'.

In terms of 'user', we can analyse Text 3C as in Fig. 3.2.

Geographical dialect:	Midlands of England	cannot be relayed
Temporal dialect:	contemporary with publication; now dated	could be relayed
Social dialect:	working class	
Standard:	non-standard	
Idiolect:	[unmarked]	

Figure 3.2 Characterisation of user in Text 3C

It is interesting that, in translations of this passage into other European languages (French, German and Danish versions were consulted), no attempt is made to render the dialectal speech, e.g.:

> 'Du mußt mal zu meinem Haus kommen,' sagt er. . . . 'Ich muß die laterne nehmen', sagt er, 'es wind schon niemand unterwegs sein'.
>
> (Lawrence 1960)

These translators are unanimous in rejecting the artificiality of some TL dialectal equivalent. Yet it is also true that the alienating effect of the use of non-standard speech in the source text is inescapably lost.

USE-RELATED VARIATION

The distinction between dialect and style in the account of language variation sheds light on the conscious stylistic choices made by language users. But what are the factors which affect this choice? Within the user-use framework (developed by Halliday *et al.* 1964, Gregory and Carroll 1978, and others), a relationship exists between a given situation and the language used in it. **Register** is the term employed for the kind of variety which is distinguished in this way, i.e. according to use. In the words of Halliday *et al.* (1964:87),

> The category of register is postulated to account for what people do with their language. When we observe language activity in the various contexts in which it takes place, we find differences in the type of language selected as appropriate to different types of situation.

That is to say, registers are defined in terms of differences in grammar, vocabulary, etc., between two samples of language activity such as a sports commentary and a church service. We distinguish three main types of register variation, as in Fig. 3.3.

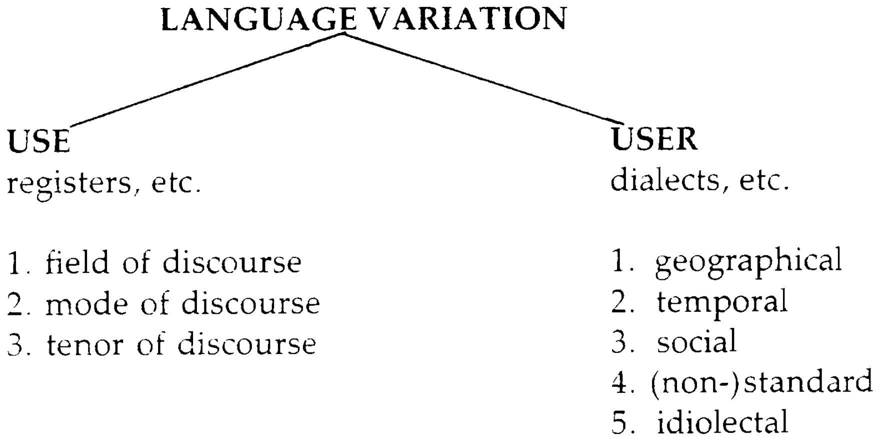


Figure 3.3 Use-related variation

In isolating registers, Halliday *et al.* (1964) make a number of pertinent remarks about how the notion is to be understood. Firstly, the category 'situation' is not to be restrictively interpreted as the event or state of affairs being talked about. These by themselves do not determine the linguistic choices made. What is of more importance in establishing the situation–use relationship is the 'convention' that a given linguistic utterance is appropriate to a certain use. This insight is particularly relevant to translators and revisers who have to cope with the inappropriateness of texts such as the news report reproduced in Text $3D_1$, which appeared in an English-medium magazine.

Text $3D_1$

> The newly formed Babylon Company for the Production of Cinema and TV films decided to produce three TV serials in the coming months including 'The Last Days' and 'An Evening Party.'
> It is noteworthy that Babylon Company was formed on February 7, 1980 with a capital of over 6 million Dinars.
>
> (IRAQ 8.2.1980)

The text is undoubtedly a translation from Arabic, but it is problematic because of the nebulous nature of the relation between the language of the text (particularly that of the second paragraph) and the situational conventions surrounding it (those of news reporting). News reports in English do not normally contain expressions such as *it is noteworthy* to signal background information. If the text is to achieve its goal, significant modifications are called for. At the stage of revising the translation, in all probability a reviser would opt for deleting those parts of the text which violate situational appropriateness and modifying the order of presentation, perhaps along the lines of Text $3D_2$. (See also Chapter 9 on text structure.)

Text $3D_2$

> The Babylon Company for Production of Cinema and TV films, established yesterday with a capital of over ID 6 million, has decided to produce three television serials over the coming months, including *The Last Days* and *The Evening Party.*

A second observation in the early formulation of register theory by Halliday and his colleagues is that it is often the collocation of two or more lexical items and not the occurrence of isolated items that determines the identity of a given register. By the same token, although grammatical and lexical features can separately point to a given register, it is common to find that the combination of features from both these levels is significant. Sentences (1) and (2) below are equivalent in terms of propositional content:

(1) I am sending you. . .
(2) Please find enclosed. . .

However, the collocational format of (2) violates the conventions of personal notes and would therefore be inappropriate as an informal note to a friend.

Thirdly, the category 'situation type' includes any number of similar situations (tokens) of the general type. Thus, making your next appointment with the dentist's receptionist is a particular token of a recognised type of situation. It is suggested that users' awareness of conventional situation types facilitates effective communication. A common core of grammatical and lexical features appropriate to many situation tokens can be identified. There are here the seeds of a theory of text types, which we shall develop in Chapter 8. For the moment, let us note that this insight is of immediate relevance to the translator. Translator-training programmes are often based on situational syllabuses, e.g. legal translating, technical, administrative, etc. Within this framework the benefit of concentrated work on terminology is obvious and aspects of language use such as those reviewed below should not be underestimated.

Field of discourse

Three basic aspects of register can be distinguished: **field of discourse, mode of discourse** and **tenor of discourse**. Field, or the reference to 'what is going on' (i.e. the field of activity), is the kind of language use which reflects what Gregory and Carroll (1978) call 'the purposive role', or the social function of the text (e.g. personal interchange, exposition, etc). This is similar to Crystal and Davy's (1969) 'province', which additionally emphasises the occupational, professional and specialised character of fields (e.g. a religious sermon). Whichever account of register one chooses, there is general agreement that field is not the same as subject matter. Firstly, it is often the case that we encounter fields that are characterised by a variety of subject matters (e.g. political discourse as a field may be about law and order, taxation or foreign policy). Secondly, in certain fields (e.g. a swimming lesson), use of language is ancillary. Put differently, it is only when subject matter is highly predictable in a given situation (a physics lecture) or when it is constitutive of a given social activity (courtroom interaction) that we can legitimately recognise a close link between field and subject matter.

In translating and interpreting, field can become a problem when working from a source language such as English which has developed a scientific and technical culture and, consequently, a wide variety of what Gregory (1980) calls 'marked fields of discourse' to reflect this 'world experience'. Translators working into target languages in the developing world face the challenge of forging new expression in these fields – an activity which transcends issues of bilingual terminologies and broaches wider questions of identity, ideology, etc. By the same token, English and French as target languages would also have problems with 'the myriad praise names of the Yoruba Oba' (Gregory 1980: 464).

Mode of discourse

Mode refers to the medium of the language activity. It is the manifestation of the nature of the language code being used. The basic distinction here is that between speech and writing and the various permutations on such a distinction (e.g. written to be spoken, etc.). Gregory and Carroll (1978: 47) illustrate the extent of mode variation by means of a diagram, reproduced here as Fig. 3.4.

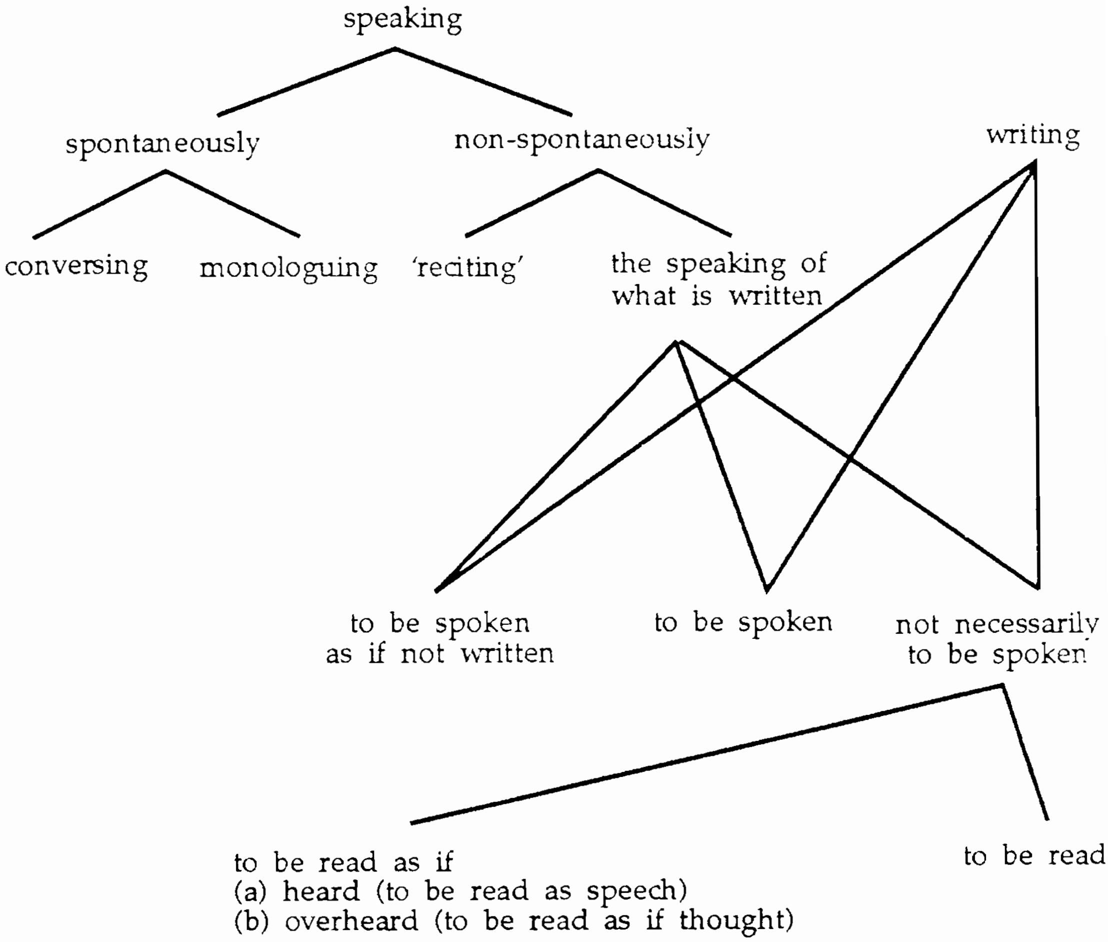

speaking
spontaneously
non-spontaneously
writing
conversing
monologuing
'reciting'
the speaking of what is written
to be spoken as if not written
to be spoken
not necessarily to be spoken
to be read as if
(a) heard (to be read as speech)
(b) overheard (to be read as if thought)
to be read

Figure 3.4 Mode of discourse

Channel, as the vehicle through which communication takes place, is an important aspect of mode. It transcends speech vs writing to include other communicative occurrences such as the telephone conversation, the essay, the business letter, etc. Also included here are differences in language use between dialogues and monologues. In Halliday's later writings (e.g. 1978: 144–5), mode even includes rhetorical concepts such as expository, didactic, persuasive, descriptive and the like.

It is quite common, however, for fluctuations in mode to be inappropriately reflected in translated material. This is true not only of some translations of literary classics, but even of instances of journalistic translation: an off-the-cuff remark often reads as ponderously as the journalist's considered opinion. Likewise, when films are subtitled, certain phonological features of mode have to be represented in writing. This mode shift can create problems, such as how to represent in writing the slurred speech of a drunkard. The area is worthy of greater investigation than it has so far received.

Tenor of discourse

Tenor relays the relationship between the addresser and the addressee. This may be analysed in terms of basic distinctions such as polite–colloquial–intimate, on a scale of categories which range from formal to informal. On such a cline, various categories have been suggested ('casual', 'intimate', 'deferential', etc.) but it is important that these should be seen as a continuum and not as discrete categories.

This kind of variation is relevant in translating between languages which are culturally distinct from one another. Namy (1979) relates how interpreting between American and French trade union officials involves a constant shift of tenor. Whereas the French make deliberate use of an educated formal tenor, their American counterparts conventionally do the opposite, displaying their working-class allegiance with liberal use of colloquialisms, etc.

In addition to personal tenor, which covers degrees of formality, Gregory and Carroll (1978: 53) suggest that there is a further kind of tenor, namely **functional tenor**. It can be defined in the following terms:

> Functional tenor is the category used to describe what language is being used for in the situation. Is the speaker trying to persuade? to exhort? to discipline?

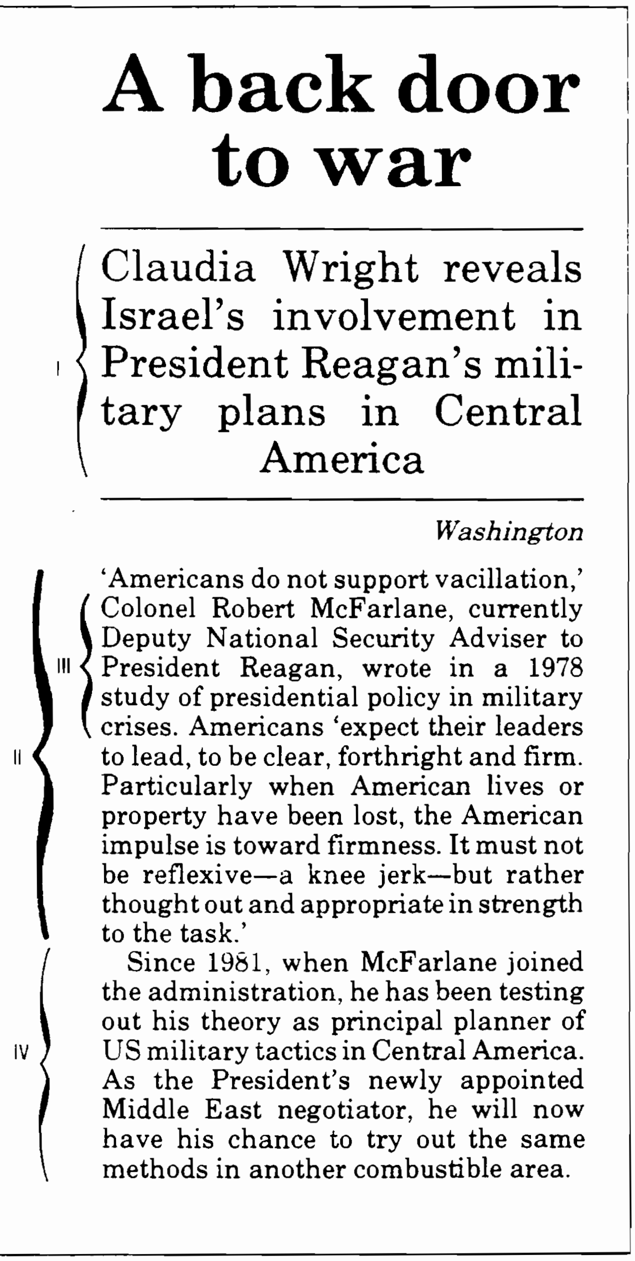
In fact, there is overlap between all three variables, field, mode and tenor. The values accruing from the three dimensions of language use help us define and identify registers. The three variables are interdependent: a given level of formality (tenor) influences and is influenced by a particular level of technicality (field) in an appropriate channel of communication (mode). Translators who are required to produce abstracts in a target language from SL conference papers, for example, will be attentive to the subtle changes in field, mode and tenor that are involved. Abstracts are written to be read and normally display a neutral functional tenor. Yet the conference papers from which they are derived may be 'written to be spoken' and are often highly persuasive.

THE INHERENT FUZZINESS OF REGISTERS

In the absence of any stringent formal criteria for distinguishing one register from another, it has always proved difficult to discern the precise boundaries of any given register. The danger always exists that a given register is simply equated with a given situation, giving rise to so-called 'special languages' such as 'the language of politics', 'the language of advertising', 'the language of journalism', etc. These overgeneralisations can be misleading, and it is important to perceive the multifunctional nature of texts, an issue which we look at in detail in following chapters.

It should be noted that this point echoes sentiments expressed in the early days of register analysis. As far back as the early 1960s, Halliday and his colleagues (e.g. 1964: 94) asserted that '[a speaker] speaks . . . in many registers', thus allowing for shifts of register within texts. From the translator's point of view, this kind of fluctuation in one and the same text is of crucial importance. In Text 3E, for example, at least four domains of use are in evidence. These are numbered in Roman numerals and are discussed below.

Text 3E



A back door to war

Claudia Wright reveals Israel's involvement in President Reagan's military plans in Central America

Washington

'Americans do not support vacillation,' Colonel Robert McFarlane, currently Deputy National Security Adviser to President Reagan, wrote in a 1978 study of presidential policy in military crises. Americans 'expect their leaders to lead, to be clear, forthright and firm. Particularly when American lives or property have been lost, the American impulse is toward firmness. It must not be reflexive—a knee jerk—but rather thought out and appropriate in strength to the task.'

Since 1981, when McFarlane joined the administration, he has been testing out his theory as principal planner of US military tactics in Central America. As the President's newly appointed Middle East negotiator, he will now have his chance to try out the same methods in another combustible area.

(*New Statesman* 1983)

I (*Claudia Wright reveals . . . Central America*)

Here, we have the editorial 'attention-getting' device. In terms of register analysis, this may be described as follows:

Field: arousing interest in the topic
Tenor: slick, in-the-know salesmanship
Mode: headline-like abstract, written to read as if heard (i.e. it is reminiscent of a TV or radio announcer's introduction)

II (*Americans do not . . . to the task*)

Field: American domestic policy and international current affairs
Tenor: emotive, operative, manipulative use of rhetoric
Mode: political speech, written to be spoken

III (*Colonel Robert McFarlane . . . military crises*)

Field: news reporting
Tenor: detached, factual
Mode: written to be read

IV (*Since 1981 . . . combustible area*)

Field: assessing current affairs (investigative journalism)
Tenor: authoritative, evaluative commentary
Mode: editorialising through seemingly detached reporting; written to be read reflectively.

A successful translation will seek to reflect these different 'harmonies' through the appropriate use of language variation.

RESTRICTED REGISTERS

It goes without saying that it is futile even to attempt to list the total range of language uses. The category of situation type is only a helpful classificatory device. But in actual analysis correspondence between situation and language remains vague and different criteria for grouping texts will have to be investigated (see Chapter 8). Nevertheless, in attempting to classify language in terms of the intersection of user–use, we need to start with a fairly well-defined type of linguistic variation. In this respect, a promising area of investigation is **restricted registers**.

The restriction in question refers to the purpose of the communication. One basic feature of such registers is the predictable and limited number of formal (phonological, lexical, grammatical) items and patterns in use within a fairly well-defined domain of language activity. An example of restricted registers is the language of international telecommunications. It is hardly surprising in this respect that the area in which machine translation has so far found most success is that of restricted registers: the Canadian system METEO for translating weather forecasts runs on a restricted dictionary of some 1500 entries and is said to have an 80 per cent success rate without any need for post-editing.

The degree of register restriction may be viewed as a continuum. At one end we have maximally-restricted registers such as 'diplomatic protocol'. At the other end, we have open-ended registers such as the 'language of journalism'. In between, we may locate registers such as those of weather bulletins, insurance contracts, etc. The continuum establishes the relationship of a given register to its situation, a relationship which is expressed by Gregory and Carroll (1978: 68) in the following terms:

> The more typical or stereotyped the situation, the more restricted will be the range of options from which choices in the field, mode and tenor can be made. . .

It is interesting to note that some organisations which have adopted machine translation systems now encourage their staff to draft texts in restricted registers in order to render them machine-usable.

On the other hand, we need to beware of positing such unrestricted registers as 'commerce' and 'journalism'. To attempt to quantify the frequency of items of vocabulary and grammar in such wide domains cannot lead to any meaningful characterisation of a register. Thus, whereas our concept of register is a fairly adequate device for predicting language use in restricted domains, it becomes less powerful in unrestricted areas. Here, other factors are at work which translators need to respond to. These will be the subject of Chapter 4.