Reiss, Katharina and Hans Vermeer (1984/2013) *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action: Skopos Theory Explained*, translated by Christiane Nord, English reviewed by Marina Dudenhöfer. Manchester: St Jerome.

Snell-Hornby, Mary (1988/1995) *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Vermeer, Hans (1989/2012) 'Skopos and commission in translational action', in Lawrence Venuti (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3rd edition (2012), London and New York: Routledge, pp. 191–202.

5.0 Introduction

Watch the introductory video on the companion website.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a move away from linguistic typologies of translation shifts, and the emergence and flourishing in Germany of a functionalist and communicative approach to the analysis of translation. This tied in with advances in linguistic studies of the complex parameters of text comprehension and generation. In this chapter, we look at:

(1) Katharina Reiss's early work on text type and Mary Snell-Hornby's later 'integrated' approach;
(2) Justa Holz-Mänttäri's theory of translatorial action;[2]
(3) Hans J. Vermeer's skopos theory, which centred on the purpose of the TT;
(4) Christiane Nord's more detailed text-analysis model which continued the functionalist tradition in the 1990s and beyond.

5.1 Text type

Katharina Reiss's work in the 1970s built on the concept of equivalence (see Chapter 3) but viewed the text, rather than the word or sentence, as the level at which communication is achieved and at which equivalence must be sought (Reiss 1977/1989: 113–14). Her functional approach aimed initially at systematizing the assessment of translations. It borrows from the (1934/1965) categorization of the three functions of language by German psychologist and linguist **Karl Bühler** (1879–1963):

(1)   **informative function** (*Darstellungsfunktion*);
(2)   **expressive function** (*Ausdrucksfunktion*);
(3)   **appellative function** (*Appellfunktion*).

Reiss links the three functions to their corresponding language 'dimensions' and to the text types or communicative situations in which they are used. These links can be seen in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1   Functional characteristics of text types and links to translation methods (translated and adapted from Reiss 1971/2000)

Text type:	Informative	Expressive	Operative
Language function:	Informative (representing objects and facts)	Expressive (expressing sender's attitude)	Appellative (making an appeal to text receiver)
Language dimension:	Logical	Aesthetic	Dialogic
Text focus:	Content-focused	Form-focused	Appellative-focused
TT should . . .	Transmit referential content	Transmit aesthetic form	Elicit desired response
Translation method:	'Plain prose', explicitation as required	'Identifying' method, adopt perspective of ST author	'Adaptive', equivalent effect

The main characteristics of each text type are summarized by Reiss (1977/1989: 108–9) as follows.

(1)   **Informative text type**. 'Plain communication of facts': information, knowledge, opinions, etc. The language dimension used to transmit the information is logical or referential, the content or 'topic' is the main focus of the communication.
(2)   **Expressive text type**. 'Creative composition': the author uses the aesthetic dimension of language. The author or 'sender' is foregrounded, as well as the form of the message.
(3)   **Operative text type**. 'Inducing behavioural responses': the aim of the appellative function is to appeal to or persuade the reader or 'receiver' of the text to act in a certain way, for example to buy a product (if an advert), or to agree to an argument (if a political speech or a barrister's concluding statement). The form of language is dialogic and the focus is appellative.

(4)   **Audio-medial** texts, such as films and visual and spoken advertisements which supplement the other three functions with visual images, music, etc. This is Reiss's fourth type, which is not represented in Table 5.1, and which are now commonly called 'multimodal texts' (see section 5.1.3 below).

Text types are therefore categorized according to their main function. For each of these text types, Reiss (1976: 20) also gives examples of what she calls 'text varieties' (*Textsorte*), now more commonly known as **genres**, that are typically associated with them. These are presented visually in Figure 5.1.
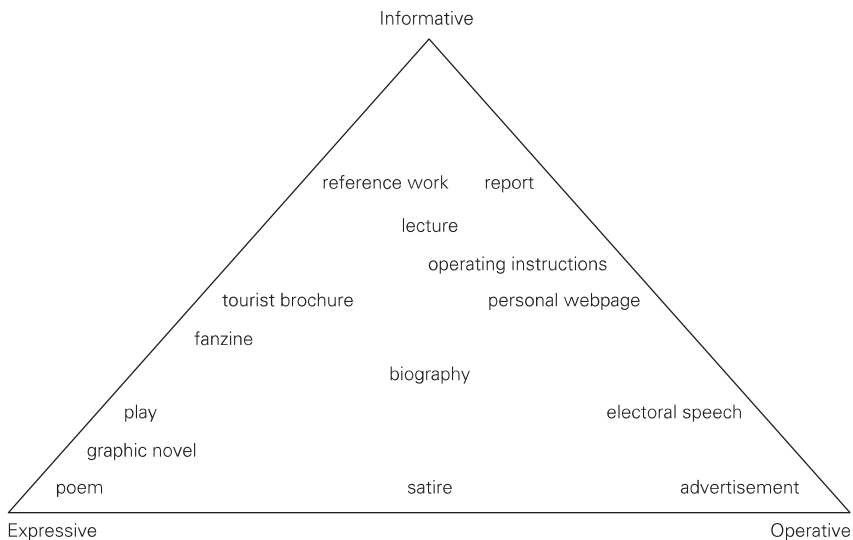

Figure 5.1   Reiss's text types and text varieties (adapted from Chesterman 1989: 105, based on a handout prepared by Roland Freihoff).

Following this diagram, a reference work (e.g. an encyclopedia, such as Wikipedia) would be the genre that is the most obviously informative text type; a poem is a highly expressive, form-focused type, and an advertisement is the clearest operative text type (attempting to persuade someone to buy or do something). Between these poles are positioned a host of **hybrid** types. Thus, a biography (e.g. of a major political figure such as Barack Obama) might be somewhere between the informative and expressive types, since it provides information about the subject while also partly performing the expressive function of a piece of literature. It may even have an operative function in convincing the reader of the correctness (or error) of the subject's actions. Similarly, a personal webpage gives facts about the individual but also often presents a flattering portrait. And a religious speech may give information about the religion while fulfilling the operative function by attempting

to persuade the audience to behave in a certain way. It too may have an expressive function as a piece of rhetoric.

> ### 5.1 Exploration: Text types and genres
>
> Look at translations that you yourself have done (either in a language class or in professional translation situations). How would you fit them into Katharina Reiss's text typology – both as text types and genres? How many are 'hybrids'?

Despite the existence of such hybrid types, Reiss (1977/1989: 109) states that 'the transmission of the predominant function of the ST is the determining factor by which the TT is judged'. She suggests 'specific translation methods according to text type' (Reiss 1976: 20). These methods occupy the last two rows of Table 5.1 and can be described as follows.

(1) The TT of an **informative text** should transmit the full referential or conceptual content of the ST. The translation should be in 'plain prose', without redundancy and with the use of explicitation when required. So, the translation of an encyclopedia entry of, say, the Tyrannosaurus Rex, should focus on transmitting the factual content and terminology and not worry about stylistic niceties.

(2) The TT of an **expressive text** should transmit the aesthetic and artistic form of the ST, in addition ensuring the accuracy of information. The translation should use the 'identifying' method, with the translator adopting the standpoint of the ST author. So, the translator of James Joyce would need to try to write from the perspective of the author. In literature, the style of the ST author is a priority.

(3) The TT of an **operative text** should produce the desired response in the TT receiver. The translation should employ the 'adaptive' method, creating an equivalent effect among TT readers. So, the TT of an advert needs to appeal to the target audience even if new words and images are needed.

(4) **Audio-medial texts** require what Reiss calls the 'supplementary' method, supplementing written words with visual images and music.

Reiss (1971/2000: 48–88) also lists a series of intralinguistic and extralinguistic **instruction criteria** (*Instruktionen*) by which the adequacy of a TT may be assessed. These are:

(1) **linguistic components:**
  ■ semantic equivalence

- lexical equivalence
- grammatical and stylistic features;

(2) **non-linguistic determinants:**
- situation
- subject field or domain
- time
- place (characteristics of country and culture)
- receiver
- sender
- 'affective implications' (humour, irony, emotion, etc.).

Although interrelated, the importance of these criteria varies according to text type and genre (Reiss 1971/2000: 58). For example, the translation of any content-focused text, such as our encyclopedia entry of the Tyrannosaurus Rex, should first aim at preserving semantic equivalence. The translation of the genre 'popular science book' would generally pay more attention to the accessibility and individual style of the ST author while the translation of a scientific article for experts would be expected to conform to the specialized conventions of the academic article. Similarly, Reiss (ibid.: 59) feels that it is more important for a metaphor to be retained in the translation of an expressive text than in an informative TT, where translation of its semantic value alone will be sufficient.

These adequacy criteria are valid as a measure of quality in those translation situations where the TT is to have the same function as the ST. There are, of course, occasions, as Reiss allows (1977/1989: 114), when the function of the TT may differ from that of the ST. An example she gives is Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Originally written as a satirical novel to attack the British government of the day (i.e. a mainly operative text), it is nowadays normally read and translated as 'ordinary entertaining fiction' (i.e. an expressive text). Alternatively, a TT may have a different communicative function from the ST: an operative election speech in one language may be translated for analysts in another country interested in finding out what policies have been presented and how (i.e. as an informative and expressive text).

5.1.1 Discussion of the text type model

Reiss's work is important because it moves translation theory beyond a consideration of lower linguistic levels, the mere words on the page, beyond even the

effect they create, towards a consideration of the communicative function of translation. Indeed, recognition that the function of the TT may be different from the ST function was crucial in challenging the prevailing view of equivalence that saw the translator's goal as achieving equivalent effect (see Chapter 3). However, over the years there have been a number of criticisms of the text type model (see Fawcett 1997: 106–8). One of the **criticisms** is why there should only be three types of language function. Although she works in the same functionalist tradition as Reiss, Nord (1997: 44, see also section 5.4 below) perhaps implicitly accepts this criticism by feeling the need to add a fourth '**phatic**' function, taken from Roman Jakobson's typology, covering language that establishes or maintains contact between the parties involved in the communication.[3] A simple example would be a greeting or phrase such as 'Ladies and gentlemen' that is used to signal the start of a formal speech, or 'Hello' when someone answers the phone.

There are also question marks as to how Reiss's proposed translation methods are to be applied in the case of a specific text. Even the apparently logical 'plain-prose' method for the informative text can be questioned. Business and financial texts in English contain a large number of simple and complex metaphors: markets are *bullish* and *bearish*, profits *soar, peak, flatten, dive* and *plummet*, while *the credit crunch bites*, *hostile takeover bids* are launched and *fiscal haircuts* imposed.

5.2 Exploration: The translation of metaphors

Look for English source texts in the financial domain which contain the metaphors listed above. How would you translate them into your other language(s)? If possible, find out how they have been translated in target texts, for example for the United Nations, World Bank or European institutions.

Some of these have a fixed translation in another language, but the more complex and individualistic metaphors do not, and more recent work has also moved from the consideration of linguistic metaphor to conceptual metaphors (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980) that represent and structure perceptions of reality. One example given by Dickins (2005: 244) is the frequency of Arabic metaphors about information which feature verbs of motion (e.g. *There has reached to our programme . . . a question*) whereas English tends to prefer metaphors of giving and receiving (e.g. *Our programme has received a question*).

Another point is whether Reiss's preferred translation methods are reversible. For example, we might accept a plain-prose method for translating the English financial metaphors above into a language where such a metaphorical style was out of place – so, *profits soar* may be rendered as *profits increase considerably*. But what would we do when translating a financial text from that language into English? A translation of such a text *into* English (or other similar languages) surely requires not just attention to the informative value of the ST. It also requires the use of the lexical and conceptual metaphors that are common to that genre in English. Failure to do so would produce an English TT that was lacking in the expressive function of language.

This example contains an important implicit criticism for Reiss's whole theory – namely, **whether text types and genres can be differentiated on the basis of the primary function**. An annual business report, classed by Reiss as a strongly informative text, may also show a strongly expressive side. It may also have several functions in the source culture: as an informative text for the company's directors and as an operative text to persuade the shareholders and market analysts that the company is being run efficiently. In Figure 5.1, the biography could also easily have an appellative function, especially if it is an autobiography, such as Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* (Crown Publishers, 1995, 2004) or Tony Blair's *A Journey* (Cornerstone, 2010). An advertisement, while normally appellative, may have an artistic/expressive and/or informative function, such as many posters of the Spanish Civil War or of the Soviet Union. Co-existence of functions within the same ST and the use of the same ST for a variety of purposes are evidence of the fuzziness that fits uneasily into Reiss's clear divisions, which we shall look at in the next section. Finally, the translation method employed depends on far more than just text type. The translator's own role and purpose, as well as sociocultural pressures, also affect the kind of translation strategy that is adopted. This is a key question in the rest of this chapter and also in Chapter 6.

5.1.2 Mary Snell-Hornby's 'integrated approach'

In her book *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach* (1988, revised 1995), the Vienna-based scholar, teacher and translator Mary Snell-Hornby reviews and attempts to include a wide variety of different linguistic and literary concepts in an overarching **'integrated'** approach to translation based on text types. Snell-Hornby comes from a predominantly German-theoretical background and notably

borrows the notion of **prototypes** for categorizing text types. Depending on the text type under consideration, she incorporates cultural history, literary studies, sociocultural and area studies and, for legal, economic, medical and scientific translation, the study of the relevant specialized subject. Her view of the field is illustrated by Figure 5.2.

Snell-Hornby (1995: 31) explains that, horizontally, the diagram is to be read as a series of clines, from left to right, with no clear demarcations. This is complemented by a 'stratificational model' proceeding from the most general (A) to the most specialized (F).

In **level A**, she sets out to integrate 'literary', 'general language' and 'special language' translation into a single continuum, rather than isolating them according to separate areas of translation.

Level B indicates prototypical basic text types: so, for example, for literary translation there is Bible, stage/film, lyric poetry etc. On the right is light fiction, which begins to merge into the newspaper/general information types of general language.

Level C 'shows the non-linguistic disciplines . . . which are inseparably bound up with translation'. These include sociocultural knowledge for general language translation and special subject studies for specialized translation.

Level D then covers the translation process, including (i) understanding the function of the ST, (ii) the TT focus and (iii) the communicative function of the TT.

Level E covers areas of linguistics relevant to translation.

Level F, the lowest-order level, deals with phonological aspects, such as alliteration, rhythm and speakability of stage translation and film dubbing.

This is a very ambitious attempt to bring together diverse areas of translation and to bridge the gap between the commercial and artistic translations described by Schleiermacher in 1813 (see Chapter 2). Yet one must question whether an attempt to incorporate all genres and text types into such a detailed single overarching analytical framework is really viable. Inconsistencies are inevitably to be found. Here are some examples.

■ On level B, can all 'newspaper texts' really be lumped together as 'general language translation'? Some may be quite specialized technical, scientific, financial, sporting, etc. texts. Should 'film' translation be treated as literary translation? Our discussion of the characteristics of audiovisual translation in Chapter 11 shows that it operates under very different constraints.

■ Why is 'advertising' placed further from the literary than is 'general'? It may well have far more in common with the creative language of lyric poetry (see our discussion of 'transcreation', also in Chapter 11).
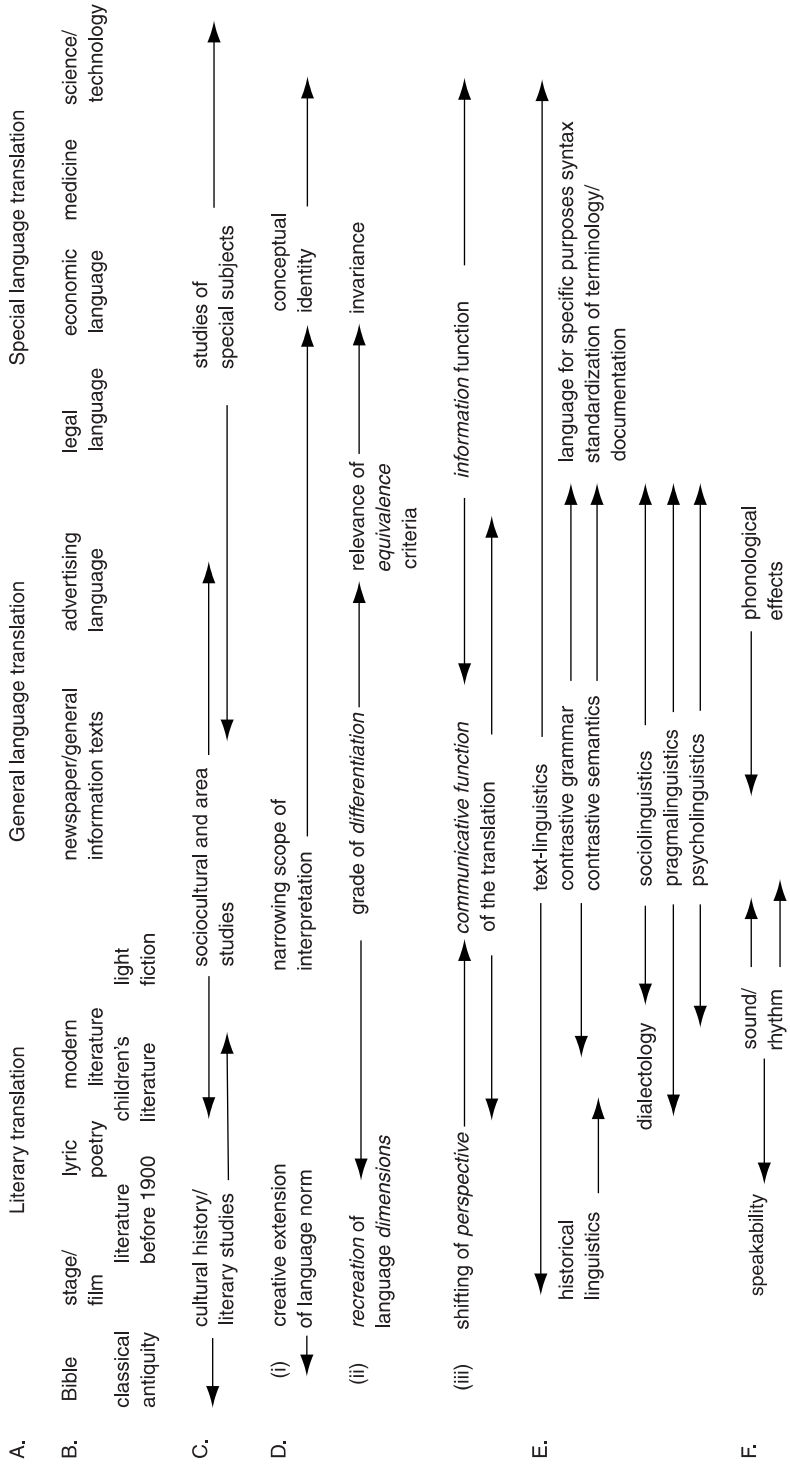
A.   Literary translation   General language translation   Special language translation

B.   Bible   stage/   lyric   modern   light   newspaper/general   advertising   legal   economic   medicine   science/
              film   poetry   literature fiction information texts   language   language language   technology
      classical literature children's
      antiquity before 1900 literature

C.   cultural history/ ——— sociocultural and area ———   studies of
      literary studies   studies   special subjects

D.   (i)   creative extension ——— narrowing scope of ———   conceptual
             of language norm   interpretation   identity

      (ii)   recreation of ——— grade of differentiation ——— relevance of ——— invariance
             language dimensions   equivalence
                                                              criteria

      (iii) shifting of perspective ——— communicative function ———   information function
                                          of the translation

E.   text-linguistics
      historical ——— contrastive grammar ——— language for specific purposes syntax
      linguistics   contrastive semantics   standardization of terminology/
                                               documentation
      dialectology ——— sociolinguistics
                       pragmalinguistics
                       psycholinguistics

F.   speakability ——— sound/ ——— phonological
                       rhythm   effects

Figure 5.2 Text type and relevant criteria for translation (from Snell-Hornby 1995: 32)

- On level C, 'cultural history' may be just as relevant to the translation of a medical text as to a literary one.
- The 'studies of special subjects' may also be appropriate to the background of literary texts. For instance, it would be impossible to translate Tsao Hsueh-chin (1715–1763)'s *A Dream of Red Mansions* (红楼梦) without researching feudal society in the Qianlong era, and Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (*Magic Mountain*) requires knowledge of the regimes of Alpine sanatoria of the 1920s.
- Similarly, 'speakability' need not be restricted to literary works. Translations of foreign news interviews may be designed to be read as a voice-over, while translations of written speeches may also need to retain, recreate or compensate for the rhythm or sound of the ST.

Even though we may quibble with Snell-Hornby's categorization, the removal of rigid divisions between different types of language is to be welcomed. There is no necessity for translation studies to focus solely on the literary or religious, as was so often the case in its early days. Nor, by contrast, should the focus be restricted solely to the technical. On the other hand, it would also be true to say that the consideration of all kinds of language in such an integrated continuum does not necessarily produce more useful results for the analysis of translations and for translator training. A student wishing to be a commercial translator is likely to need somewhat different training compared to one who would like to be a literary translator, even if each may benefit from studying the work of the other.

5.1.3 Web localization and digital genres

Technological developments in multilingual communication since the 1990s have stressed **domain specialization** and have seen new **multimodal genres** and **text types** emerge (emails, webpages, blogs, tweets, social media posts) that may demand instant translation, often provided by an automatic translate function. Jiménez-Crespo (2013: 97–9) provides a classification according to text type or 'supra-genres' (informational, advertising, instrumental, communication-interaction, entertainment), functions, participants, **web genres** (personal homepage, corporate website …) and subgenres (personal, professional, etc.). These are naturally hybrid and combine in different ways (ibid.: 100). A multilingual version is produced through a process known as **localization** (see section 11.2) in which, as well as linguistic transfer, adaptations are made in order to allow the 'product' (or text) to function satisfactorily in its target context or 'locale'.