

Take the message and jump!

By Christiane Nord

Many beginning translators fall into a common trap: they produce a quick first draft closely mirroring the source text, and do not make revisions to adjust for language and style until afterwards. They build on this first draft with two or three or more drafts, depending on the time available before the deadline forces them to submit the final product, regardless whether they are fully satisfied or not. However, the task of translation is not simply converting words from one language to another. Both the linguistic and cultural context—which together form a *linguaculture* (see Definition 1)—must be taken into account to achieve the ultimate goal of conveying a message effectively from one linguaculture to another.

Linguaculture:

A unit formed by both language and culture in which the use of language, along with other modes of communication such as body language, is determined by the people who use it according to cultural norms and conventions.

Definition 1: Linguaculture

Let's flesh this concept out some more. Imagine that someone in Linguaculture A wants Text X translated for a specific audience in Linguaculture B and orders a translation. Text X therefore becomes a source text. The arrows in the image below (Figure 1) represent the successive steps from the first draft to the final product. If there is not enough time, the final product can end up not only imperfect but far from adequate, failing to make it across the culture hurdle even though it switches between languages.

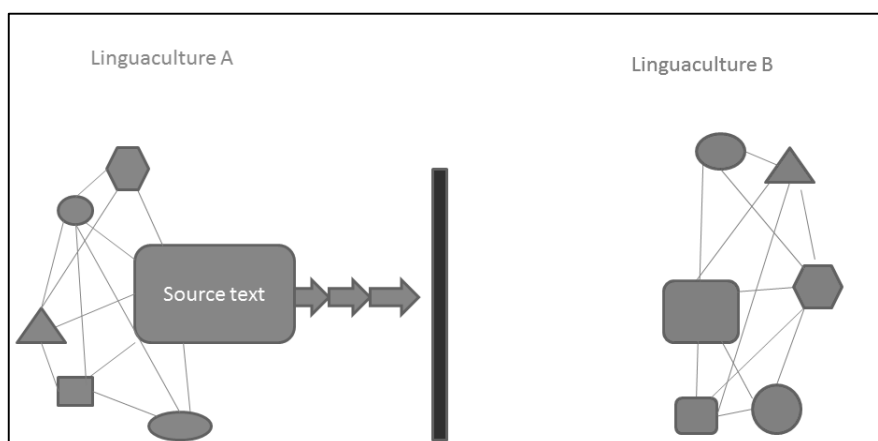


Figure 1: Creeping towards the culture hurdle

An example of this method, as well as an explanation of how to bridge the linguaculture gap, can be found in a set of texts taken from my book *Text Analysis in Translation*. The original text is in German and the quote below is from the fourth edition (2009). The text was first translated into English from German (1991), and the revised second edition (2005) is quoted below. Next, the text was translated into Spanish, also from the German (2012). Finally, a Brazilian Portuguese translation is in progress, using the English as the source. This translation is still a draft—as evidenced by the exclamation marks used to point out some imperfections. All of these texts are reproduced below (see Figure 2, on page 3). We will consider these translations from the perspective of linguacultures, beginning with Portuguese and continuing with English and Spanish.

The Brazilian Portuguese text shows the problems that can occur if you work your way very slowly from a first draft towards the culture hurdle. There is a poor interpretation of the syntactic relationships between lexical units, such as *um conceito de textualidade orientada para tradução* (“a concept of translation-oriented textuality” instead of “a translation-oriented concept of textuality”). Other errors include a few missing articles because the English source did not have them (for translation – *para [a] tradução*, communicative signals – *[os] sinais comunicativos*, non-verbal elements – *[os] elementos não verbais*); an awkward word order (*apenas* is placed at the end of a clause, copying the syntax of the English and disregarding that of Portuguese); a missing comma; another comma that is superfluous; a period separating two parts of a sentence that form a single unit of thought, etc. These errors lead to a message that does not make any sense at all.

All these small details show that the translators closely followed the surface structure of the source text without thinking about the message itself. The translators did not jump over the culture hurdle but rather stayed in source-culture territory, as evidenced by the erroneous words *tradução de Nord* (“Nord’s translation”) in parentheses after the Portuguese translation of the Kallmeyer quote. Obviously, this translation was not produced by Nord but by the Brazilian translators, who saw that the English source text was marked as “my translation” because I myself had translated the text from German to English.

On the other hand, the English and Spanish translations of the German original show the development of my own ability to jump over the culture hurdle. I translated this text from German into English in 1991 and from German into Spanish nearly twenty years later. The quote is a case in point. The German original reproduces the quote in its original German form and then paraphrases it, specifying the different verbal and non-verbal meanings we find in a text. In the German text, the goal of the quote is (1) to demonstrate that the author of the

book has read the existing literature on text linguistics (relevant in 1988), one of the requisites of scholarly writing, and (2) to give the readers the opportunity to look up the original context of the quote themselves.

German

Für einen übersetzungsrelevanten Textbegriff ist ein weiterer Gesichtspunkt von Bedeutung, der in der Textdefinition von Kallmeyer et al. (1980: 45) angedeutet ist: „Text ist die Gesamtheit der in einer kommunikativen Interaktion auftretenden kommunikativen Signale.“ Ein Text muss also nicht nur aus sprachlichen Elementen (Signalen) bestehen, sondern kann durch nicht-sprachliche Elemente (in der mündlichen Kommunikation etwa durch Mimik und Gebärden, in der schriftlichen etwa durch Illustrationen, Druckgestaltung, Firmenlogos etc.) ergänzt oder begleitet werden oder sogar überwiegend aus solchen bestehen (besonders deutlich wird das bei Comic-Texten, vgl. Spillner 1980). (Nord [1988]2009, 15)

English

There is yet another aspect which has to be taken into account for a translation-oriented concept of textuality. It is mentioned implicitly in the definition given by Kallmeyer et al.: “A text is the totality of communicative signals used in a communicative interaction” (1980: 45, my translation). Communicative signals need not always consist of linguistic elements alone, but these may also be complemented or accompanied or even replaced by non-linguistic or non-verbal means, such as intonation, facial expressions, or gestures in face-to-face communication, or by illustrations, layout, a company logo, etc. in written communication. In some texts, non-verbal elements may be of even greater importance than verbal elements, as is the case in comic strips (cf. Spillner 1980). (Nord [1991]2005, 16; trans. C. Nord)

Spanish

Para concluir, tenemos que mencionar otro aspecto significativo para un concepto traductológico de textualidad. En la práctica de la traducción profesional, los textos base muchas veces no constan exclusivamente de elementos verbales sino también de elementos no verbales (p. ej., ilustraciones, maquetación, etiquetas, logotipos de empresa, tablas, láminas) o paraverbales (en la comunicación oral: mímica, gestos, ruidos, etc.), que acompañan el enunciado verbal. En algunos textos, incluso, los elementos no verbales tienen prioridad sobre los verbales, como en las tiras cómicas o las fotonovelas (cf. Spillner 1980). (Nord 2012, 15; trans. C. Nord)

Brazilian Portuguese

Há ainda outro aspecto que tem de ser levado em consideração para um conceito de textualidade orientada para tradução. É mencionado implicitamente na definição dada por KALLMEYER et al.: “um (!) texto é o (!) conjunto de sinais comunicativos utilizados em uma interação comunicativa” (1980, p. 45, tradução de Nord (!)). Os Sinais (!) comunicativos nem sempre precisam consistir de elementos linguísticos apenas (!), mas podem igualmente ser complementados ou acompanhados por significados (!) não linguísticos ou não verbais, tais como entonação, expressões faciais, e gestos, na comunicação face a face, ou de ilustrações, um determinado layout, um logotipo de uma empresa, etc. na comunicação escrita. em (!) alguns textos, os elementos não verbais podem ainda ter maior importância que os elementos verbais, como é o caso de histórias em quadrinhos. (Draft translation, various trans., cf. Nord 2015)

Figure 2: Dealing with quotes in scholarly literature

In the English translation, I translated the quote in its entirety. As a result, it still meets the first goal by demonstrating scholarship, but the second goal cannot be met, given that the book edited by Kallmeyer is in German, and the readers of the English translation would find it difficult or even impossible to find the quote, let alone read and understand the German context in which it appears. But at the time, I did not have the courage to simply omit the quote. In the Spanish translation—which was done when I had far more experience—I did not translate the actual quote. Instead, I simply expanded and restructured my own paraphrase. The text was still able to meet both of its original goals because later the text would use an indirect reference (cf.) to Spillner, another German author who dealt with the non-verbal aspects of texts, to demonstrate the author’s knowledge of the literature.

Comparing the English and Spanish translations to the Portuguese version shows one thing very clearly: even after two or three (or four) revision phases, the Portuguese text is still part of culture A (German), although it is written in language B (Portuguese). It has not crossed the cultural gap between A and B and will never be able to do so if it does not take the leap from linguaculture A to linguaculture B. Have you ever watched a horse jump? When the horse stands right in front of the hurdle, it will not be able (or willing) to make the jump. It needs to gather speed from a certain distance—you could also call it “courage”—and then jump across the obstacle with verve. The same thing needs to happen in translation, as illustrated in Figure 3, where the message leaps over the culture hurdle from the source text to the target text.

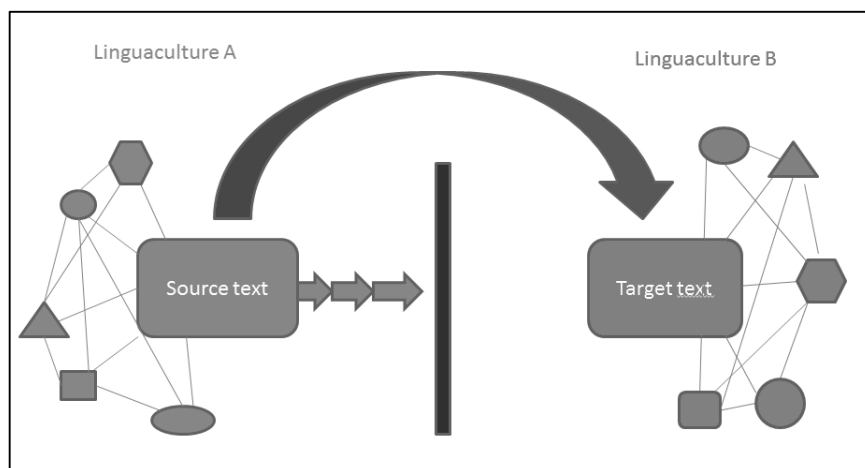


Figure 3: Jumping with vim and vigor

On the other side of the hurdle, the text will become part of the target linguaculture—not only with regard to language but also with regard to its cultural aspects. Now the target text can establish relationships with existing texts in linguaculture B, in the same way that the source text was related to the other texts of the source culture repertoire. These networks of texts are specific to each culture, usually containing texts which are both non-translated and translated from different linguacultures, short and long, borrowed and stolen, interesting and boring. One of the cultural aspects which a translated text becomes part of is the classification of texts in sets according to different criteria, which can vary from one linguaculture to another depending on what kind of text it is.

In some cultures, translated and non-translated texts would be included in the same set if they belong to the same text type, whereas in others, translated texts would be grouped in a separate set, perhaps with sub-sets like “texts translated from Chinese” or “texts translated from Russian”. There could even be empty sets. Think of a culture that does not have any translation from Icelandic—there may be an empty box or set waiting for the first translation to drop in. After the first text is placed in the box, later translators of texts from this source linguaculture will probably use the earlier translations as a model or at least as a frame of reference for solving certain translation problems. The more translations there are in a set, the more probable it is that all translations from this linguaculture will display certain common features which then may be qualified—or disqualified—as “translationese”; that is, displaying typical features of translated texts which are not found in non-translated texts.

Even if a linguaculture does not categorize texts based on their linguaculture of origin, we all know that certain features of source languages creep into the target language in translation, and they often come to stay. This happens both with regard to vocabulary and, although not as easily, with regard to syntax. Some of these features fill a gap in the target language, while others are regarded as “bad habits”, at least by purists, such as the use of English “cleft” constructions (*it was John who told me about it*) in German or very long and complicated sentences common to German in English.

These borrowings can be either ridiculous or helpful, depending on the function they fulfil and the attitudes of the target linguaculture. Some are simply ridiculous because they show that you have not mastered the specific capabilities of your own language (in German, the prosodic rules allow emphasis on any sentence part, as in *John told me about it*—no need to change the word order for emphasis). Others are useful since they fill terminological gaps or make communication easier. One example is the strong audience-oriented approach in relation to scholarly texts, which is typical of the Anglo-Saxon academic style. The influence of the audience-oriented approach is slowly revolutionizing the

impersonality of the German (or “Teutonic”) academic style, which is characterized by nominal and passive constructions that do not establish any relationship with the audience. For example, the use of the first person singular “I”, which was an absolute taboo (an infringement of the convention of modesty) when I was a student, has become rather acceptable in German academic discourse today. This change is probably appreciated by newcomers to a discipline who have to work their way through a heap of scholarly literature.

As we can see, whether or not a translation is considered acceptable in spite of some traces of translationese—or even because of them—depends on the target culture and its attitude towards translated texts. Moreover, the question of whether adaptation to target culture standards is desirable or necessary depends on the purpose of the translation.

Because of these attitudes, we must revise our graphic again to take a closer look back at the background and purpose of a translation. The jump in Figure 3 may be too wide, or during the jump you may have lost something from your saddlebag which, according to your translation brief, should have been carried across to the target linguaculture. So take a look back to make sure that your target text fulfils the requirements of your brief (see Figure 4).

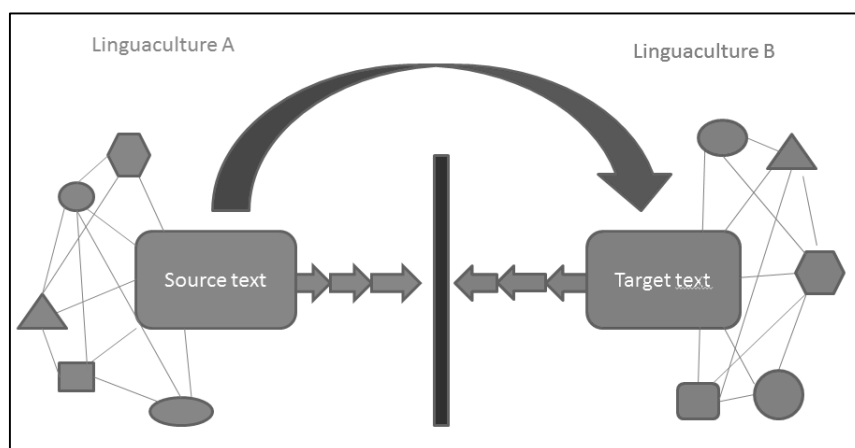


Figure 4: Jump wide and look back

You may even need to make two or three or more revisions, as Figure 4 shows, but when you compare the results of this procedure with that of Figure 1, you will see that they mainly differ with regard to their cultural environment. In the process depicted in Figure 1, the culture hurdle was not even reached, let alone overcome. In the process represented in Figure 4, we have produced a target

culture centered text that still reflects certain elements or features of the source text.

A final example will help us to learn how looking back can be useful to check the quality of a translation. The guarantee of Anton Berg chocolates, a Danish company, is translated into English, German, French, and Spanish in Figure 5 (on page 8). Let's take the translations and look back at the Danish source text to observe how this method can be useful. There are problems with including too much and with not including enough, as well as examples of well-used generalizations and specifications.

One initial example of including too much can be found in the English translation. It says that if you have a complaint, you should enter the price you paid for the chocolate. However, there is no place to write this on the form for the customer to fill out. This makes the text incoherent. Here, the English translator jumped too far and should delete the item after looking back.

The Spanish translation, on the other hand, includes too little and ends rather abruptly in the middle of a sentence, without specifying where to send the damaged product and that you would get a replacement for it. Perhaps this was the fault of the translator, or perhaps the Danish typesetter, who, not understanding Spanish, simply deleted the end of the sentence because the layout did not allow for more text. Even if a client can figure out where to send the package and assumes that he or she will receive a replacement, the company's image suffers because this type of text presents the company in a negative light, since an incomplete text does not make a good impression on customers.

Examples of well-used generalization can be found in the rendering of the Danish *ved tryk eller stød* ("by pressing or jolting"). The German translation conveys this as *auf dem Transport* ("in transit") and the English says *during shipment*. Looking back, we can state that *during transport* and *during shipment* are generalizing translations which cover the reasons for damage mentioned in the source text. In this case, the German and English translators did not lose anything they would have to recover by looking back.

We also see specification, the opposite of generalization, in the information that the customer is told to provide in case of a complaint. In the English, French, and Spanish they are told to write the name of the product, where it was bought, and when. However, the Danish original and the German translation simply ask the reader to refer to the form, which specifies the details that are needed anyway. It is possible that the English translator added the extra information in order to adjust the length of the text to match that of the other texts; however, the Spanish translator would have been better off omitting the extra information and using the remaining space to complete the last sentence, which is left unfinished.

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 LEVERANDØR TIL DET KONGELIGE DANSKE HOF

ANTHON BERG har altid bestrebt sig for at levere varer af fineste kvalitet.

hokoladen kan dog tage skade ved tryk eller tød, eller den kan påvirkes af varme, stærk kulde eller fugtighed. Sådanne påvirkninger kan fremkalde et gråligt skær på overfladen, hvilket dog ikke behøver at påvirke smagen og heller ikke behøver at betyde, at varen er gammel eller øskadiget.

Skulle der irredertid være noget, De ikke er tilfreds med, så send venligst ærken med den beskadede vare sammen med denne garantismedel i udfyldt stand til Anthon Berg (se bagsiden).

ANTHON BERG
 BY APPOINTMENT TO THE ROYAL DANISH COURT

ANTHON BERG of Copenhagen, Denmark, famous chocolate makers since 1884, has built its reputation on the exclusive use of the finest raw materials available, combined with the strictest quality control and most careful packaging.

Should the chocolate nevertheless reach you in less than perfect condition, for example because of damage during shipment or discoloration due to extreme changes in temperature - both conditions beyond our control - we invite you to request a replacement of the package. Please return this coupon (outside Europe via air mail) and as much of the package as practical and state where and when bought, price paid, and your reason for dissatisfaction (see other side). *The terms of this guarantee do not affect your statutory rights*

ANTHON BERG
 FABRICATEUR DE LA CULOR ROYALE DE DANEMARQUE

ANTHON BERG, Copenhague, chocolaterie fondée en 1884, fabricant des produits de qualité supérieure, a conservé sa réputation en livrant des marchandises toujours soigneusement sélectionnées, contrôlées et emballées, de manière à préserver le bon goût et la fraîcheur.

Cependant, le chocolat peut être endommagé pendant le transport ou bien par des changements de température, ce qui peut créer une teinte grise sur la surface, mais inoffensive sur le goût.

Dans le cas où vous seriez insatisfait de nos produits, nous vous prions de bien vouloir nous retourner l'emballage avec le bon de garantie à l'adresse indiquée au verso et mentionner la date de l'achat, le nom et l'adresse du magasin vendeur, et les raisons du retour du colis. Nous serions alors heureux de vous envoyer un remplacement.

ANTHON BERG
 LEVERANDØR TIL DET KONGELIGE DANSKE HOF

ANTHON BERG, Kopenhagen, seit 1884 berühmte Schokoladenfabrik, hat ihren Ruf auf Verwendung feinsten Rohstoffe, strengster Qualitätskontrolle und sorgfältiger Verpackung aufgebaut.

Schokolade kann jedoch auf dem Transport Beschädigungen erleiden oder unter dem Einfluss von Wärme, Kälte oder Feuchtigkeit einen bläulich grauen Schimmer bekommen, der indessen Qualität und Geschmack in keiner Weise beeinträchtigt. In allen solchen Fällen, die sich unserer Kontrolle entziehen, bitten wir Sie, unsöufigen Garantieschein auszufüllen und ihn zusammen mit der Packung und dem Rest ihres Inhalts an uns zurückzusenden. Wir werden Ihnen alsdann umgehend Ersatz schicken.

ANTHON BERG
 FABRICATEUR DE LA CULOR ROYALE DE DANEMARQUE

ANTHON BERG de Copenhague, Dinamarca, famosos chocolateros desde 1884, debe su buena reputación al uso exclusivo de las más finas materias primas, combinado esto con el más estricto control de calidad y un empacquetado sumamente cuidadoso.

Sin embargo el chocolate puede estropearse durante el transporte o bien por cambios de temperatura, que podría crear un tinte grisáceo en la superficie. A pesar de ello esto es inofensivo manteniéndose el mismo sabor.

En el caso de que, a pesar de ello, Ud. no estoviese satisfecho con nuestro producto, le rogamos devolver el envase con el remanente del chocolate junto con este bono de garantía debidamente llenado con su nombre y dirección, nombre del producto, fecha de la compra, nombre y ubicación de la tienda así como la causa de su reclamación a

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Figure 5: Anton Berg warranty in Dutch, English, French, German, and Spanish

In conclusion, you may have a tendency to creep towards the culture hurdle and risk getting stuck right in front of it, instead of leaping across it. The next time you start a translation, why not make the jump across and have a look around in the target culture, adjusting your text to the models that are already there? However, don't forget to make sure that you really took the whole message with you! Good luck!