'FUNCTION' REVISITED: EXPANDING THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE RECEPTOR CONTEXT

Maria Lúcia Vasconcellos

UFSC

1. Introduction

One well-known problem in any field of investigation is the difficulty of overcoming the lack of terminological consistency in the treatment of basic issues within a specific area. Such inconsistency is not only misleading in that it may confuse readers as to the reference of the concept referred to, but also dangerous in that it can completely undermine the claims and arguments put forward by the author using the notion. I am aiming this comment at a central lack of clarity concerning the concept of FUNCTION as used by Roberts (1992: 1-16), in her article "The Concept of Function of Translation and Its Application to Literary Texts".

Roberts makes two claims that have serious consequences both for translating and for translation quality assessment, namely i) 'it is the *function of the translation* that is the translator's guiding force', and ii) 'the type and degree of coincidence between the source text and the translation depend on the precise *function of the translation*, rather than on the function of the source text' (ibid: 2, italics mine).

In reviewing the literature, Roberts suggests that the functional approaches to translation proposed so far have had limited success, which she explains in terms of two inadequate equations, that of function of language with function of text, and that of function of the source text with function of the translation. In trying to discuss the possible causes of this lack of success, Roberts starts from a distinction between the three different types of functions: i) function of language; ii) function of text; ii) function of translation.

Assuming that this is a valid distinction, some problems remain: i) what is the nature and scope of the term FUNCTION as used in Roberts 's article?; ii) how valid is her statement of and accountability for the 'limited success' of functional theories of translation drawn upon for the development of her main argument?

On the assumption that the concept FUNCTION does not have the same meaning and the same scope in the different frameworks discussed by Roberts, the first part of this article addresses the questions above, in an attempt to clarify the references made to the theories of translation drawn upon. There are, as this paper argues, different criteria for defining the term as well as different levels of generalization within the classifications offered by each model.

Having tackled the problem of terminological inconsistency, this paper underpins the central claim made in Roberts's article — *the establishment of the function of the translation as the translator's most important decision* — by expanding her definition of FUNCTION OF TRANSLATION. This discussion is carried out in the second section, with a view to including the role of literary translations in the receptor literature and culture as mechanisms of integration, exclusion and manipulation.

Finally, some pedagogical consequences and implications of the 'functional' approach are discussed, and a sample workshop developed on such bases is presented as an illustration of suggested classroom work.

2. 'Function' or 'functions'? The concept revisited

The first distinction made by Roberts is that between 'functions of language' and 'function of a text'. As Halliday (1985:15) points out,

> in the simplest sense, the word 'function' can be thought of as a synonym for the word 'use', so that when we talk about functions of language, we may mean no more than the way people use their language, or their languages if they have more than one. Stated in the most general terms, people do different things with their language (...), they expect to *achieve different aims and different purposes* (italics mine).

There seems to be then, as Halliday suggests, a common meaning

of the term FUNCTION which is directly connected to the idea of doing things with language for certain purposes, or to the idea of putting language to certain uses. It is this common sense that seems to inform the understanding of the term as used in Roberts's paper and to underlie the equation of FUNCTION with USE in her discussion. Bühler's view of function seems to fall into this category, and so does Jakobson's. This is what the next section goes on to discuss.

2.1 'Function' in Bühler's and Jakobson's frameworks

Being a psychologist, Bühler's concern seemed to be not so much the culture but the individual and the way he *used* his language. Thus the distinction he proposes into *expressive* language, *conative* language, and *representational* language had to do with the *orientation* of the *function* in relation to *the individual*: the expressive being oriented towards the self, the speaker; the conative oriented towards the addressee; and the representational towards the rest of reality (On this aspect, see Neves 1994:109,110).

Bühler's scheme was extended by Roman Jakobson (1960), who added three more functions: the *poetic* function, oriented towards the message; the *transactional* (or phatic) function, oriented towards the channel; and the *metalinguistic* function, oriented towards the code. Once again, the key issues here seem to be the *orientation* of the message in relation to the self and the underlying principle of putting language to certain uses: *function equals use*, which implies an *instrumental* view of language. Such approaches to 'function' are, as Halliday (1985:16,17) describes them, 'conceptual frameworks' constructed in 'non-linguistic terms, looking at language from the outside, and using this as a grid for interpreting the different ways in which people use language.'

2.2 Halliday's macro-functions

Interpreting functional variation not just as the use of language but as *a fundamental property of language itself*, Halliday (ibid) sees 'function' as 'something that is built in, as the very foundation, to the organisation of the language itself, and particularly to the organisation of the semantic system' — which constitutes his

'metafunctional hypothesis'. especially in his 1994 version of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday makes it clear that he is looking at language as a *modelling system* (106), and explains that the functional components of the linguistic system proposed by his approach are 'the manifestation in the linguistic system of the two general purposes which underlie *all* uses of language: (i) to understand the environment (ideational), and (ii) to act on the others in it (interpersonal)' (1994: xiii).

The place of the 'functions' in the organization of language is clearly seen in the schematic representation of language as social behavior (Halliday 1978:69), reproduced below:
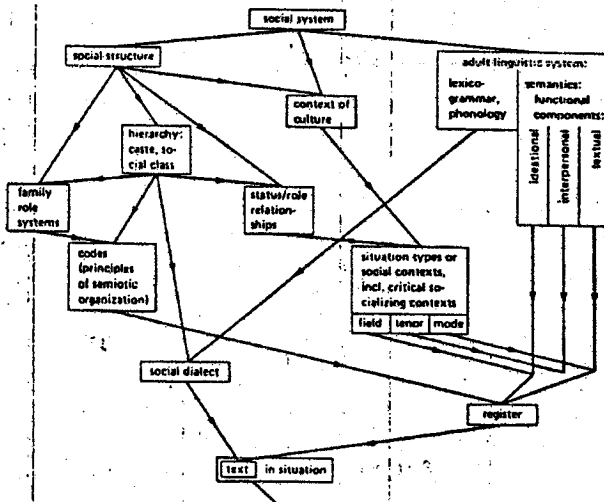
Schematic representation of language as social semiotic,

While it is not my intention to develop a thorough elaboration on Halliday's model here, the discussion carried out so far suffices to show the basic differences in the uses of the term 'function' within these different theoretical frameworks.

Although Roberts sensibly discusses the 'macro-functions' in terms of abstract representations of the basic functions which language is made to serve, she seems to miss some subtle implications of this approach and, in fact, to fall into the trap of inadequate equations herself:

> While the example analysed above is that of a sentence and a
> text is a not a supersentence but a semantic unit encoded in
> sentences, it nevertheless becomes clear that it is an oversimp-
> lification, if not an error, to equate language functions with
> text functions and to base text types on specific language func-
> tions, as Peter Newmark does (1981: 12-16).

Roberts refers, in this comment, to the much cited example by
Halliday (1973:43), *This gazebo was built by Sir Christopher Wren.*
However, she uses the word 'sentence' to refer to it, neglecting the
fact that Halliday has referred to this unit as 'a clause', maintaining a
terminological difference between 'clause' and 'sentence', the latter
being interpreted as a 'clause complex' (1994:215). Another important
point is that, although working at clausal level, Halliday allows for
considerations 'above', 'below', 'beyond' and even 'beside' the
clause. As Gutwinski (1976:21) says, 'although not dealing directly
and exclusively with the problems of discourse structure, M. A. K.
Halliday's work has some important implications for discourse
analysis (...) and has much relevance for formulating statements about
the nature of the structure of connected discourse.' Thus Roberts's
argument against equating language function with text function on
the basis of Halliday's model does not seem to stand in the context of
her criticism of Newmark's equation. Her comment is made in relation
to Newmark's classification of text, which she calls 'a fallacy'(5):
Roberts seems to overlook the fact that Newmark's model is based
on Bühler's language functions, which, as I have tried to demonstrate,
are not to be identified with Halliday's macro-functions. Newmark's
use of the term 'function' is discussed below.

2.3 Newmark's use of the notion of 'function'

If one thinks in terms of *orientation* as Bühler does, in theory, there
does not seem to be anything wrong with Newmark's equation of
language function with language text: a text can also be *oriented*
towards different entities, be they the content, the author or the reader.
Newmark's semantic/communicative scheme for types of translation
are based exactly on what he calls *bias* (see 1981:38), which is just
another term for orientation. Now whether Newmark's model proves

effective or not in guiding and explaining the choices the translator has to make is another issue, which has nothing to do with the equation of language function with text function.

2.4 The Reiss/Vermeer paradigm

Another reference to the term 'function' in Roberts's text is made in a passing allusion (2) to Reiss and Vermeer's functional approach to translation, which she does not take the trouble to develop further. Here again, some misunderstanding takes place for, although instrumental at its base, the term 'function', as used in Newmarks' classification of translations and Reiss and Vermeer's 'Skopos' theory, presents different implications, both historically and theoretically.

Within the theoretical framework of the 'top-down' model for translation going on in Germany in the 70's, Reiss develops her 'relevant text typology for the translation process' (Reiss, 1972:28, as quoted in Gentzler, 1993:71). Also drawing on Bühler's classification of the functions of language, she suggests that, although a single text seldom represents a single function, but rather various mixed forms, one of them always predominates. She then establishes her typology on the basis of the emphasis of the function of the language in the text: representational (emphasizing content or information), appelative (emphasizing appeal to the reader), and expressive (emphasizing the form of the language). Once again, the concept of 'function' is viewed in its instrumental aspect.

Reiss's work culminates with co-work together with Hans J. Vermeer in 1984. Their argument is that 'the translation should be governed primarily by the one functional aspect which predominates, or, in the new terminology, by the original's Skopos (Greek for the intent, the goal, the function)' (Gentzler, 1993:71). According to this theory, the coherence of the translated text is dependent upon the **translator's concept of the Skopos of the original text, and that of the** skopos of the target text. Again, the equation of language function with text function is made on reasonable grounds. The 'limited success' of the model cannot, it seems to me, be accounted for by its equation of language function with text function. Maybe an explanation would lie exactly in the insistence of the model in fidelity to the "Skopos" of the original, an issue not discussed by Roberts.

2.5 Nida's instrumental use of 'function'

A reference to Nida's theory constitutes one more passing allusion
to functional approaches to translation which did not succeed. Roberts
does not discuss either the model or its utility, but, as it also makes
use of the term 'function', it merits discussion. In this framework,
called 'scientific' (see Nida 1964, for example), the term 'function'
appears in relation to the dichotomy 'formal' vs. 'dynamic' equival-
ence, the latter being emphasized in the theory: the translated text,
according to Nida, should produce a response in a reader of today's
culture that is essentially like the response of the 'original' receptors
(Nida and Taber, 1969: 202). If it does not, changes in the text should
be made so as to guarantee that the target language text functions in
the same way as the source text. Meaning is redefined in terms of its
'function', the term 'function' serving the theorist's religious beliefs
and interests: Nida privileged the manner in which the message, the
word of God, was rendered in the target text, thus fulfilling the original
'function'. Again, in this framework, the term 'function' is used in
its instrumental meaning.

2.6 Finding fault with House's equation

House (1977:37) provides Roberts with a definition of the 'function
of the text', which she adopts: 'the application ...or use which the
text has in the particular context of a situation.' However, House's
initial formulation insisting on the equivalence between the function
of source text and that of translated text is criticized by Roberts.
Nevertheless, she acknowledges the fact that House's criterion for
translation quality was relativized in cases of 'overt translation', where
source-culture-linked source texts make it impossible to achieve strict
'functional' equivalence (House 1976:246).

In calling into question House's model for translation quality
assessment, Roberts rejects the criteria for evaluating the translation
in terms of the function of the source text and advocates the
independence of the functions of translation on the grounds that 'the
reasons for translation are independent of the reasons for the creation
of any source text' (7). Having problematized House's formulation,
she is now in a position to propose her view of 'function of translation',

which she goes on to do in the rest of her article.

As I have tried to show, with the exception of Halliday's use of the term, 'function' has been equated with 'use' thus realizing an instrumental aspect of the concept. In the light of these considerations, it seems reasonable to claim that Roberts's main argument might well have done without her insistence in the distinction between 'function of language' and 'function of text', especially because she does not tackle the terminological problem which is posed by the loose use of the term 'function'. As it stands, her point could have been developed from her assertion in page (7): 'what seems to be required is an independent consideration of the functions of translation'. This claim would have 'functioned' as the starting point of her argument, as she called into question House's initial insistence on the equivalence between the function of the source text and that of the translated text.

3. 'Function of translation': Broadening Roberts's definition

In order to develop her argument, Roberts (7) adopts the definition of 'function of translation' as 'the applications and uses translations are intended to have in a given context of situation', which she acknowledges as an adaptation of House's definition of the function of text, mentioned above. The two key words applications and uses then become the translator's guiding force and the touchstone by which the quality of the translation is to be judged.

In the light of the consideration of factors which have implications for translation strategy and constitute the translator's most important decision, Roberts identifies various 'functions' (which she calls applications or uses) of literary texts in the context of the target situation. Interestingly, out of the seven uses listed, six are oriented towards the source in the sense that they are at the service of the 'presentation' or 'introduction' of source elements into the target situation, be they 'thematic content', 'a writer's point of view or style', 'different cultural elements', 'new literary forms' or even 'new linguistic forms'. Interesting as they might be, these applications turn out to be one-way avenues, allowing for transmigrations of various kinds (procedures, genres, trends) in the 'source-into-target' fashion alone, which configurates a hegemonic sort of affairs.

Only the last item in the list has the opposite orientation: 'creating a work that becomes part of the target literature' (italics mine). The typical example of this kind of 'function' is provided by the 'bèlles infidèles', those 17th century translations in France that were given stylistic adornments, 'even if this involved distortion of the source text' (10), in order to be accepted by the French readership thus becoming part of the target system.

However, as mentioned in Gentzler (1993: 192), there are some indications that 'a slight opening in the cultural hegemony is about to occur'. This comment was made by Susan Bassnett, in a lecture delivered at the annual summer research seminar held at the University of Leuven. At this occasion, Bassnett mentioned the fact that some poets and translators from Brazil had been developing something like a post-modern and non-Eurocentric approach to translation. The de Campos brothers were cited as translators who refused any sort of preordained original, but instead viewed translation as a form of transgression. For the description of their translations, Bassnett explains, the de Campos brothers come up with their own terms, one of them being translation as a form of 'cannibalism', the term here meaning a symbolic act of absorbing the virtues of the source text.

This 'cannibalistic' view, far from being inconsistent with Roberts's claim, constitutes, as I see it, an expansion of her thesis that 'it is the function of the translation that determines what will be omitted or added to it' (14). This expansion is able then to encompass legitimate appropriations of source texts, like, for example, Machado's translation of Poe's "The Raven", discussed in Bellei (1987:60):

> Machado translates also to be a man of his own country, that is, he misreads, distorts and adapts foreign texts so that, by means of this act of appropriation, what is foreign becomes a part of an alternative context. It is such an act of appropriation that I think best explains the mistranslation of "The Raven" in the *Ocidentais*.

Machado's 'appropriation' is an example of a translation functioning as a mechanism of integration, exclusion and manipulation in the target situation. While not predicted in Roberts's categories, such mechanisms can be suggested as expansions to her list of ap-

plications reflecting specific uses in a given society for a given purpose.

4. Some pedagogical implications: an illustration

In the light of the considerations made so far, this section proposes to discuss some pedagogical consequences and implications of adopting the 'functional' view of translation as suggested here, extending the range of the reflections to non-literary texts.

Anyone familiar with translation teaching, especially in introductory courses, will recognize a characteristic situation involving would-be translators which I call 'Source Syndrome'. I refer to the feeling of anxiety and discomfort resulting from ignoring the possibility of and the extent to which the translator can interfere with the source text. Sometimes this feeling is so strong that it has a hindering effect, making it very difficult for beginners to progress during the course. Thus, adopting a 'functional' approach to translation has the direct consequence of easing this anxiety as it can free the student from the burden of 'fidelity' to the 'original': they get to understand that 'the reasons for translation are independent of the reasons for the creation of any source text' (Roberts, 7). Within this paradigm, students are led to see that the establishment of the function of the translation is their most important decision as it will guide all the choices they have to make, whether they are translating a literary or a non-literary text.

In order to illustrate this approach at work in the classroom, a sample workshop developed by two professors from PUC-Rio, namely Márcia A.P. Martins and Maria Paula Frota, is provided in Appendix 1.

This workshop presents a source text of a specific type — an advertisement for a cigarette — written in American English for an American audience, and suggests three different contexts in which the translation is to be embedded. In other words, each context consisting of a different application of the translated text. As the students become aware of the 'function' as their guiding force, they feel freer to come up with translations which, because of the different uses they will serve, are informed by different strategies.

This practical work is carried out with students at the beginning

of the course to function as a shock treatment, and to raise their awareness to the complexities of translation which, though an activity in language, involves much more than a text, an individual and a bilingual dictionary.

5. Final Remarks

The main reason for my reviewing Roberts's text was the fact that I subscribe to the thesis implicit in her main argument, that is — the establishment of the function of the translation as the translator's most important decision. As I see it, this approach constitutes a form of dealing with translations in a way that goes beyond right or wrong, taking into account all the complexities involved in the act of translating.

Though not exhaustive, the discussion carried out in section 2 above was intended to solve the indeterminacy problem stated in the introduction, attempting at clarifying the concept of 'function' as used in different historical and theoretical contexts. As I see it, the consequences of flawed understanding of key concepts are far reaching and can both compromise and render less rigorous any argument built upon them.

This question having been tackled, the present paper underpinned the main thesis of Roberts's article by suggesting expansions to her categories. It is my belief that if translation criticism ceases to valorize translations which measure up to some ideal and starts taking into account the functions of translations in the target context, possibilities are open for new forms of legitimate translations, carried out for purposes other than those of the source text.

Finally, in order to illustrate the consequences and pedagogical implications of such an approach, a sample workshop was presented, in which the suggestion of different target contexts had the objective of stimulating not only the production of different translations suited to those specific purposes but mainly the production of informed reflection on the complexities of the translator's activity.

REFERENCES

A L F A — Revista de Lingüística. V. 38 1994 O Funcionalismo em Lingüística. São Paulo: Editora Unesp.

Bellei, S.L.P. 1988. ' The Raven, by Machado de Assis'. In *Luso-Brazilian Review*, XXV, 2. Winconsin: Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

Gentzler, E. 1993. *Contemporary Translation Theories*. London and New York: Routledge.
Gutwinski, W. 1976. *Cohesion in Literary Texts*. Paris: Mouton & Co. N.V. Publishers, The Hague.

House, J. 1976. *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Jakobson, R. 1959. 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' in Brower, R.S. (ed.) *On Translation*. Harvard: Harvard UP.

_____1960. 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in T.A. Sebeok (ed.). *Style in Language*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Milton, J. 1993. *O Poder da Tradução*. São Paulo: Ars Poetica.

Neves, M.H.M. 1994. "Uma Visão Geral da Gramática Funcional". *ALFA* . São Paulo: Editora da Unesp, p. 109-128.

Newmark, P. 1981. *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Nida, E. & C.R. Taber. 1969. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E.J.Brill.

Roberts, R.P. 1992. 'The Concept of Function of Translation and its Application to Literary Texts'. *Target* 4:1. 1-16 . Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Vermeer, H.J. 1985 . *Esboço de uma Teoria de Tradução*. Casa da Torre, Andrade: Edições ASA.

APPENDIX 1

WORKSHOP: VIRGINIA SLIMS AD

(Workshop adapted from material designed by Professors Márcia Martins and Maria Paula Frota, from Pontifícia Universidade Católica -PUC, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

CONTEXT 1:

An advertising company wants a 'literal' translation of the text, with explanatory notes, which will serve as subsidy for the assessment of the value of launching the product, with the same campaign, in Brazil. There is, then, a coincidence between the *client*, he who asks and pays for the translation, and the *target-audience*, the group of people who will read the translated text.

The *objective of the translation* is, therefore, not to function as an advertising text, persuasive in nature and aiming at selling the product, but as an instrument for a preliminary study preceding its launching in the Brazilian market.

Basically, the company is interested in verifying if the middle-class Brazilian woman is likely to be moved by this kind of advertising text in the same way as the American middle-class woman or not. If the answer is 'no', changes will be required, some subtle and others radical.

The *vehicle* for the publication will, in this case, present no special particularity.

Ex.:*You've come a long way, baby.* Você avançou muito, meu bem.

Carrie: a common female name, short for Caroline and also homophonous with the verb to *carry*, 'carregar', in Portuguese.

Bea: common short form of *Beatrice*, *Bea* being homophonous with the verb to *be* + *a* (indefinite article), used in expressions of polite command as in 'Be a good girl and bring me a glass of water.

CONTEXT 2

The *client* is an advertising company that wants the translated text to be used as publicitary material in the launching of the same product in Brazil *(objective)*.

As the *target audience* is the middle-class Brazilian woman, some adaptations will be necessary, ranging from changes in the proper names to considerations of social and cultural differences. For example, the fact that the 1910 Brazilian woman did not do the housework herself, but had servants to do the chores is something to be taken into account.

The *vehicle* for the publication and dissemination will be special women's magazines as well as *outdoors*.

Ex.: *You've come a long way, baby.* Quem te viu e quem te vê!
                                       Como você mudou!
                                       Que diferença, hein!

Hope : Might become 'E*sperança*', and the translated text might read as something related to the verb 'esperar', in Portuguese: 'Espero/ tenho esperança de que, quando eu chegar, os serviços da casa já tenham sido feitos.'

Patience: Might be translated as *'Branca',* with a change of focus to the condition of the laundry after washing, which is symbolized by the color *white* ('branca').

CONTEXT 3

The *client* is a feminist magazine wishing to change the nature of the ad so as to reach its specific audience, basically women concerned with stressing their independence and with getting rid of the traditional role attributed to them by men.

The *objective* of the translation is to highlight the symbology of the women's names as signifiers of the routine work traditionally associated with housewives, and also to bring to the fore the hard feelings they are apt to evoke.

The *vehicle* will be the very feminist magazine which both hired and oriented the translation.

The *target-audience* will naturally be the usual readers of those magazines, presumably feminists.

A change of focus will necessarily occur in the sense that the names will now reflect and evoke feelings women themselves have concerning their historical evolution, in opposition to Context 2, in which a male view of the situation was reflected.

Ex.:   *Hope* - 'Esperança': 'Espero que, algum dia, a responsabilidade pelo serviço da casa não seja só das mulheres.

[I *Hope* someday the house chores will be shared by husband and wife]

Bea — 'Flor' (Flower): 'Se eu continuar no calor do fogão todos os dias, logo vou ser uma flor murcha!

[If I go on like this, so close to the heat of the stove, I will soon be a withered *Flower*]