From World to World. An Armamentarium for the study of poetic discourse in translation
Koster, C.

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Chapter 6

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SHIFTS
THE SEQUEL: EVALUATION

If anything can be inferred from the last two chapters, it must be that nearly nothing can be taken for granted in the enterprise of establishing shifts. In this final chapter on that topic I will try to evaluate some of the more general methodological problems, and in doing so will make the final preparatory step on the way towards the armamentarium.

Normativity

The correspondence between the concepts of ‘deviation’ and ‘shift’ points to what is often considered a weakness of the concept: its supposedly axiological connotation. As we have seen, for Toury this was one of the reasons to abandon the methodological use of shifts in favour of the ‘coupled pair of replacing and replaced segments’. Toury’s objection against the use of shifts is twofold. On the one hand it pertains to the totally negative kind of reasoning required by any search for shifts, which (...) would encompass all that a translation could have had in common with its source but does not (1995: 84),

and on the other hand to the idea that the status of the invariant should always be that of a maximal, or optimal rendering (cf. ibid.).

In his earlier writings Toury has used the same ‘negative reasoning’ argument against the prescriptive bias of many source-oriented approaches to the study of translation. Because they depart from an a priori notion of equivalence, more often than not they are directed towards establishing what a translation is not, or what it fails to be (cf. Toury 1980: 40). It seems, then, that Toury associates the search for shifts primarily with source-orientation. His second objection may be interpreted in the same vein. One of the views he criticizes in normative source-oriented approaches is that they generally consider
translation from the point of view of its being (or having to be) a ‘maximal (or at least optimal) reconstruction’ of a source text (1980: 35).

Since, from a different ideological angle, it has also been argued that comparison in itself is always normative to the extent that it is essentially interpretative (cf. Bakker & Naaijkens 1991: 204), one may well ask what precisely the relationship is between the descriptive study of target text-source text relationships, normativity and source text-orientedness. Does source text-orientedness always imply normativity? And, is the study of the reconstructive aspect of the hybrid, double status of the translation always normative?

Toury is one of the theoreticians who have applied the age-old philosophical distinction between the actual and the possible to the domain of translation studies. He has related the different modalities of translational relationships to different branches of the discipline: possible relationships belong to the domain of Theoretical Translation Studies, actual relationships to that of Descriptive Translation Studies and required relationships to that of Applied Translation Studies (Toury 1980: 65; 1985: 35; 1995: 19\(^{116}\); cf. also Delabastita 1991). The relationship between the theoretical and descriptive branches is that both may serve to extend each other’s development. The apparatus for the description of target-source relationships should be provided by the theoretical branch, whereas descriptive studies should help to refine the distinctions made with respect to the possible, or potential, relationships.

On the basis of this tripartite division, one may distinguish between two different kinds of normativity. The first one involves the connection between possible and actual translational relationships. The second kind of normativity concerns the link between possible relationships and required relationships.

As to the first kind of normativity, we have seen in Chapter 5 that any comparative procedure, one way or another, entails an evaluation of actual choices against a range of possible choices. In this respect, the decision whether or not a textual element of the target text con-

\(^{116}\) In Toury 1995 the domain of Theoretical Translation Studies is extended to include probable translational relationships as well.
stitutes a shift is normative to the extent that the establishment of what is possible and what not cannot be taken for granted. The decision is dependent on the describer’s views of the relationship between the two linguistic, literary and/or cultural systems involved. Whether the cultural element ‘Skunk’ in the title of the German translation of Robert Lowell’s ‘Skunk Hour’, ‘Skunk-Stunde’, (cf. supra, Chapter 3) is an exoticization or not depends on an evaluation of the position of that element in the German cultural repertoire. Before one can call it a shift, one first has to determine whether one considers the element as an integral unmarked part of that repertoire, a mere synonym of ‘Stinktier’, or as a loanword, an alien element.

Because restricted notions of translatability put a limit to the range of the possible relationships, they also put a limit to the possible range of invariance. On the other hand, a totally unrestricted conception of translatability would render the establishment of shifts superfluous, simply because it would theoretically not be able to provide for an invariant relative to which a shift can be established.

This kind of normativity can only be avoided by abstaining from translation comparison altogether, which seems rather a high prize to pay. However, confronting an actual translation solution, something that is, with what it is not, but could have been (a potential solution), in principle is not different from any process of signification. As much as a sign (at least partly) derives its meaning from its position in the code system it is part of, a translational choice derives its significance from its position among other, alternative choices. To that extent the normativity of translation description is inherent to the status of Translation Studies as an academic discipline taking cultural products as its object. Since the study of cultural products and practices is itself a cultural practice it is bound to be interpretative.

**Possible versus required relationships**

During every instance of translation description, then, one has to depart from a notion of restricted translatability, and every restricted notion of translatability by definition departs from *a priori* notions of possible equivalence relationships. What matters is what status one wishes to assign to those notions: mere possibilities, or requirements. As we have seen at the beginning of Chapter 4, prescriptive notions of
shift consider a certain type of invariance as a requirement for the qualification of a target text as a ‘true’ translation. From this point of view one single possibility is often posited to be the correct, and therefore ‘required’ translation. This kind of normativity, then, is tantamount to equalling the notion of possibility with that of requirement (or obligation) in terms of a maximal or optimal rendering of source text features.

The problem with Toury’s old method (as well as with Frank’s one) is precisely that he chose the ‘requirement-related’ concept of adequacy as a methodological tool, and as a consequence forced himself into a normative position. The original claim was, that, because adequacy was considered a ‘given quantity’, as something that might be unproblematically reconstructed in a structural analysis\(^{117}\), the invariant was nothing more than a methodological tool. But due to the interpretative moments in a textemic analysis, the Adequate Translation in the way Toury conceived of it, actually functions as a normative yardstick\(^{118}\). The problem, however, was not located in the inherently source-orientedness of the concept of ‘shift’ itself, as he now seems to imply, but in the way it was put to use.

To my mind there is nothing inherently normative to establishing shifts with respect to a source text. There are conditions under which source-orientedness may be institutionalized and formalized to make it a normative concept:

When the source text is the sole point of departure and criterion for the comparison, then the shifts in the target text resulting from the comparison assume the status of corrections and additions to the target text and together with that text form a new translation (Bakker & Naaijkens 1991: 204; my italics).

But that seems to be the case only when the status of translation during the target text-source text comparison is reduced to its recon-

\(^{117}\)Or rather, one might say, a structuralist analysis, ignoring hermeneutic aspects.

\(^{118}\)It is interesting to note that Van den Broeck (1985) conceived of the Adequate Translation as a tool for purposes of translation criticism.
In that sense, the choice between source- or target-orientation is mainly a matter of attitude, of the point of view chosen by the describer. Because the establishment of shifts always entails gauging the position of a translational choice among a range of possible, alternative choices, it is also possible to consider a shift as a deviation from a *potential* rendering, rather than a deviation from a maximal or optimal rendering. The invariant in that case no longer functions as the normative yardstick yielded by a postulated level of adequacy. That a certain degree of normativity cannot be avoided in studying the reconstructive aspect of the double, hybrid status of translation is something that has to be accepted, the question is whether one wishes to procedurally formalize it or minimize it.

The potential rendering that serves as an invariant relative to which a shift is established may be postulated by the describer herself\(^ {19} \), but it may also be derived from alternative existing translations, either in the same or in another language. The main point is that the invariant should be put to use merely for heuristic purposes. In this respect, the comparison of several translations from a single source text (as was done, for instance, with the Kopland translations in chapter 1 and 3; and as is suggested, or may be inferred, from Toury’s five stage procedure), where actual translations may serve as the basis for an invariant, could prove to be very useful.

**Distinctive feature analysis - repertory method**

We may look upon the later methodological proposals of Toury\(^ {120} \), and the model of Van Leuven-Zwart, as ways of minimizing normativity by attempting to take neither the source nor the target text as point of departure for the comparison, but both texts at the same time. Toury’s proposals we found to be impracticable because they do not provide in a preliminary unit of analysis, but rather constitute a *tabula rasa*-approach. It does not depart from any *a priori* notion of the

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\(^{19}\) In case the text under study is the only translation available, or in case the purpose of the comparison renders that perspective relevant.

\(^{120}\) Although Toury’s thinking is pervaded by the idea that normativity should be avoided at all costs.
level(s) on which the texts should be analyzed and compared. The model of Van Leuven-Zwart does depart from such \textit{a priori} level(s): on the level of the microstructure the transemes (or rather the sentences broken down into transemes), and on the level of the macrostructure the genre-related ‘discrete parts’.

The Holmesian dichotomy of comparative methods may also be expressed in terms of their \textit{ad hoc} or \textit{a priori} character. A distinctive feature analysis, according to Holmes, ‘remains to a large extent an \textit{ad hoc} operation’ (Holmes 1976 [1988]: 89), whereas the repertory of features always to be analysed has to be determined ‘beforehand’ (ibid.), \textit{a priori}. Holmes also relates the dichotomy to normativity, and his preference for the repertory method is based on its purportedly ‘higher degree of intersubjectivity’\footnote{As much as Toury, Holmes was preoccupied by a positivistic conception of the empirical claim for Translation Studies.} (ibid.).

Source-orientedness was not a topic in Holmes dichotomy, since he discusses the methods in the context of a situation in which both source and target text are involved. Because he is not concerned with the development of a procedure, he does not deal with concepts as unit of comparison, \textit{tertium comparationis}, or with the chronological order of descriptive and comparative stages.

It seems however, that the repertory method, in theory, agrees better with prioritizing the concept of relation within a comparative procedure. Within a distinctive feature method, a \textit{tertium} will always be based on one of the texts (or some feature of it), as is the case for instance in a textemic analysis, and as a consequence, the comparison is always undertaken from the point of view of one of the texts.

That this agreement is only theoretical, may be shown by the way the repertory method is employed within the Göttingen-approach. Although their comparative checklist in principle functions as ‘a repertory of features always to be analysed’, it still formalizes source-orientedness because target text elements are related to the literary constructs of the source text, rather then those of the target text. All translations of Poe’s ‘The Raven’ that are discussed are related to the same \textit{tertium}, based on one single source text analysis. In a method that prioritizes the relationship between the texts, as may be seen in
Toury's later method and in the model of Van Leuven-Zwart, for every instance of comparison, even if one and the same source text is involved, the tertium has to be substantiated separately. This mechanism I find to be the true sign of target-orientation. A tertium should not be used to determine the conditions for invariance, but should provide for a level of comparison. Any source text-dependent tertium is bound to be linked with a preconceived notion of invariance, and as a consequence procedurally formalizes normativity. A procedure based on the principles of a repertory method is the most suitable one for minimizing it.

**Repertory**
The *a priori* character of a repertory, as may be inferred from the comparison between the procedures of Toury (the recent one) and Van Leuven-Zwart, seems to be a precondition for its practicability. The relevant criterion in devising the repertory is the purpose of the procedure. The concepts employed in the description of the relationship between the texts, and the levels on which the shifts may be located have to be pertinent to the purpose. To the extent that the purpose of the study is linked to the description of texts, the repertory also has to be based on a general theory of the text, and a specific theory of the genre to which those texts belong. As we have seen in our discussion of the procedure of Van Leuven-Zwart this constitutes a delimitation with respect to the scope of the procedure and the epis-

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122 An additional point to be made here is that it may also be useful to bring into the repertory a certain hierarchy, in terms of the order of the stages of the analysis. This is one of the major flaws in the method presented in Linn 1998. This comparative method is devised in order to reconstruct the strategy of a translator of poetry. The strategy is expressed in terms of the priority given by the translator to one of the levels distinguished within the method: formal, phonological, pragmatic-semantic, syntactic and stylistic aspects. The method consists of five sets of questions that to a high extent are arbitrary. The describer is supposed to answer all the questions, or leave some out, or add some 'at his own discretion' (cf. Linn 1998: 74). There is hardly any reflection on what to do with the answers. Although the questions proposed are not irrelevant, they form one large indiscriminate mass.

123 Or textuality, or even a functional theory of language.
temological claims that may be derived from it, but that is a delimitation I gladly accept in the light of the advantages in terms of practicability it provides. To my mind the scope of genre-restricted procedures is still broad enough to yield interesting results.

As may be inferred from the case of the Göttingen checklist, a repertory is not linked to one specific unit of comparison. In effect every single feature or linguistic or textual level on the list initially functions as a unit of comparison in itself. As a consequence, that feature or level has to be considered as 'problem-restricted' (cf. Holmes [1972a (1988)]). For every level one separately has to establish what unit of comparison is pertinent. If one takes the case of metaphor as an example, it is in the first instance the concept itself, and not every individual instance in a text, which functions as a *tertium* in the sense of a global unit of comparison. One might also posit the textual phenomenon of rhetoric as an even more global *tertium*, under which the concept of metaphor is subsumed. In the second instance one would need a theory of metaphor to provide the unit of comparison which will guide the actual analysis. The problem-restricted translational phenomenon of 'wordplay', which has been extensively dealt with in this respect, may be helpful in illustrating this point. Heibert (1993)\(^{124}\) tackles the problem of wordplay translation from a source-oriented point of view. He devises an elaborate typology of wordplay, allowing him to describe every instance of wordplay with respect to the levels of technique, content and function as well as the hierarchy pertaining between them. In a second step he analyses (a section of) a source text using these levels as parameters, and goes on to check in what way the original wordplay has been translated. His unit of comparison, then, is always the original wordplay, rather than the phenomenon of wordplay itself. Heibert's method does not provide for a separate analysis of the target text, and therefore does not allow for the possibility of detecting compensatory behaviour beyond the immediate co-text of the original wordplay\(^{125}\).


\(^{125}\) It must be added that Heibert addresses the problem from the point of view of translation criticism. To the extent, however, that criticism is based on the description of an already existing translation it is also retrospective.
By contrast, Delabastita (1993) starts from a target-oriented point of view. This book also is concerned with a theory of wordplay, but deals with the subject from a specific view on the study of translation as well. The comparative perspective includes the target text as a separate entity, and the paradigm of possible relationships between source and target text also contains potential solutions such as non-wordplay into wordplay or the addition of wordplay without any clear corresponding unit in the source text. In this way every target text element can be linked to its function in the target text’s macrostructure. Only by taking this mechanism into account, a repertory can truly serve as a tertium in a procedure that takes the concept of relation as its comparative point of departure and thereby tries to minimize normativity.

This mechanism does not only pertain to such a potentially well definable ‘problem’ as metaphor, but also to a potentially less discriminatory level of linguistic analysis as ‘lexis’. The level in itself may function as a global tertium, as a level of analysis equally relevant (though not necessarily in the same way) to the two texts under study, and it renders the word in its lexemic status, the paralexeme, or the lexical set as potentially relevant units of comparison. Every element figuring in the comparison has to be related, however, to its function within the larger whole it is part of. If we find, for instance, the set of lexical elements relating to fauna relevant to the analysis of ‘Skunk Hour’ and (or: or) its translations, one has to take this specific semantic feature as tertium, and analyse it in both texts involved in the comparison. What one should not do, is take one of the texts as the point of departure for the analysis, and check to what extent the elements found in the analysis of that text are also present in the other texts. One has to draw up a list of lexical items relating to fauna for each text separately. The lists, then, in first instance in their entirety and in second instance with respect to single pairs of elements, may be checked against each other with respect to the differences and the similarities obtaining between them.

That the enterprise of translation criticism can also be undertaken from a target-oriented point of view is shown by Hulst 1995.

Cf. also Toury 1985: 26-27 as well as 1995: 81-84 on the problem of metaphor, and Chapter 5 of this book (note 103).
Chapter 6: Shifts: Evaluation

The armamentarium - first glimpse
The armamentarium for the study of poetic discourse in translation that will be presented in the next chapter is devised according to the principles of a repertory method. In this section I will briefly sum up the theoretical assumptions underlying the armamentarium.

Methodologically speaking the armamentarium will have to allow for a target-oriented perspective, it will have to account for the circularity of the relationship between the micro- and macrostructural levels of a text, and it will have to provide for a multiple and flexible conception of a unit of comparison.

The aim of the armamentarium is to arrive at statements about the interpretation of the source text that can be constructed from the target text. The basic postulate underlying this aim is that a translation constitutes a semiotic interpretation (in a specific format), or that, at least, it is based on one (cf. Chapter 2). This interpretation may be attributed to a translator (conceptualized either as an intra- or an extratextual entity), which is latently present in the target text and which can be made manifest by comparing both texts to each other, by establishing the differences and similarities between them.

This semiotic interpretation can be transformed into the retrospective concept of ‘translational interpretation’, which is related to the concept of ‘recontextualization’. As the level of context pertinent to my descriptive enterprise I have established the context of reference (pertaining to the ideational function of language), in which two aspects are considered deserving of special attention: the situational dimension (pertaining to the interpersonal level of language) and the cultural dimension. As a means for making visible the translational interpretation the notion of ‘text world’ was introduced. The basic postulate underlying this step is that whenever there is a text, there is the possibility of constructing a text world (cf. Chapter 3). On the grounds of this postulate it is possible to use the concept of text world as a global tertium comparationis.

As the levels of analysis which may be potentially relevant to the description of text worlds to be reconstructed from poetic texts and which therefore have to be accounted for one way or another in the armamentarium, I posit the traditional levels of linguistic and textual
analysis: phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, semantics and pragmatics; the genre-specific level of prosody; and the literary relevant levels of rhetoric (in the sense of figurative language) and intertextuality\textsuperscript{127}. In the next chapter I will deal with the way in which these levels are to be related to each other.

\textsuperscript{127} These levels are not to be considered as inherently relevant to the study of literature, but rather as potentially interesting.