5
TRANSLATION AS INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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5.0 INTRODUCTION

It was E. T. Hall (1959/1990) who coined the term ‘intercultural communication’ (Rogers et al. 2002). In working with US departmental administrators and Native Americans, he noticed that misunderstanding arose not through language but through other, ‘silent’, ‘hidden’ or ‘unconscious’ yet patterned factors. In short, cultural differences. Bennett (1998: 3) explains that the fundamental premise of ‘the intercultural communication approach’ is that ‘cultures are different in their languages, behaviour patterns, and values. So an attempt to use [monocultural] self as a predictor of shared assumptions and responses to messages is unlikely to work’ – because the response, in our case to a translation, will be ethnocentric.

That translation is ‘an act of communication’ (Blum-Kulka 1986/2004: 291, emphasis in the original) has been a given since Steiner (1975/1998: 49), but not all agree about the existence or relevance of cultural differences in translation. There are three interrelated problem areas.

The first area of controversy is in the definition of culture itself. By 1952, Kroeber and Klockhohn had recorded 165 definitions, and today lobbies are still vying for authority over the meaning of ‘one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’ (Williams 1976/83: 87, also in Jenks 1993: 1).

Originally, culture was simple. It referred exclusively to the humanist ideal of what was civilized in a developed society (the education system, the arts, architecture). Then a second meaning, the way of life of a people, took place alongside. Emphasis at the time was very much on ‘primitive’ cultures and tribal practices. With the development of sociology and cultural studies, a third meaning has emerged, related to forces in society or ideology.

Hence, also, the way culture is acquired varies according to theory. For the humanists, culture is technically learnt through explicit instruction. Anthropologists believe that culture may be learned through formal or unconscious parenting, socialization or other inculcation through long-term contact with others. It then becomes unconsciously shared amongst the group (cf. Chesterman’s Memes of Translation 1997a). In sociology and
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cultural studies, culture is a site of conflict for authority or power. When it is acquired, it is through the subliminal and enforced norms of, for example, capitalist and colonialist action.

Second, there is a fairly clear historical division between those who perceive language and culture as two distinct entities, and those who view language as culture. In the first case, translation is seen as a universalist encoding-decoding linguistic activity, transferring meaning from the SL to the TL, using what Reddy (1973/1993) called the ‘conduit metaphor of language transference’. Here, culture and any cultural differences can be carried by the language without significant loss. Others, such as Nida (2002: 29), believe that ‘the context actually provides more distinction of meaning than the term being analyzed’. Hence, meaning is not ‘carried’ by the language but is negotiated between readers from within their own contexts of culture. Each readership is hence bound to receive the text according to their own expectations, and translation is necessarily a relativist form of ‘manipulation’ (Hermans 1985), ‘mediation’ (Katan 1999/2004) or ‘refraction’ (Lefevere 1982/2004) between two different linguacultures (Agar 1994).

Third, and closely related to both the above is the importance of ‘the culture filter’ in translation.

5.1 THE CULTURE FILTER


All the filters function in the same way through modelling. A model is a (usually) useful way of simplifying and making sense of something which is complex, such as ‘reality’. All models, according to Bandler and Grinder (1975), make use of three principles: deletion, distortion and generalization. In the case of human modelling we cannot perceive all of ‘what it is that is going on’ (deletion); we tend to focus selectively or fit what we see to what we know, expect, or what attracts our attention (distortion); and we tend to fill details in from our own model or level out salient differences (generalization), to make the resulting ‘map of the world’ useful.

Hence, cultural filters (for Katan) are one of the four particular, but related, ways in which groups organize their shared (limited, distorted and stereotypical) perception of the world. This follows Goodenough’s (1957/1964: 36) definition of culture as ‘an organization.... It is the form of things that people have in mind, their model of perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them’. For House (2006: 349), on the other hand, ‘A cultural filter is a means of capturing cognitive and socio-cultural
differences’ to be applied by translators, which for Katan is more closely related to the translator’s capacity to mediate.

To what extent one filter prevails over another in translation is then the third area of controversy. With ‘the cultural turn’ (Lefevere and Bassnett 1990: 1), and Bassnett’s proclaiming (1980/2002: 23) that ‘the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril’, the culture filter appeared to take the central stage. However, for Newmark (in Schäffner and Kelly-Holmes 1995: 80) there is ‘an over-emphasis on going from one culture to another [due to] universal issues that go beyond culture. They’re sometimes dressed in cultural clothes, but that’s as far as it goes’. His views coincide with many professionals (Katan 2009). Others, again, believe that the filter should operate selectively. House (2006: 347), herself states that the ‘cultural filter’ should be ‘inserted’ only for certain text types, such as tourist information books and computer manuals. For Nida (1964: 130), on the other hand, the degree of intervention depends less on the text type itself than on the cultural and linguistic distance or gap between the languages concerned.

5.2 Culture as a System of Frames

There are three related ideas which can help clarify the apparently contradictory views of culture: context(ing), frames and logical typing.

5.2.1 Context(ing)

We have already mentioned Nida’s view of the crucial importance of context. Yet, as others have noted, context is not always important. In fact, a phone book, an invoice and an instructions leaflet hardly need any context for the full meaning to be understood or to be translated. Yet what Hall (1983: 61) noted was that at all times, and in any communication, there is a process of ‘contexting’, whereby interlocutors negotiate how much of the meaning is to be retrieved from the context, how much of the context is shared, and if not shared: ‘it can be seen, as context is lost, information must be added if meaning is to remain constant’. For Hall, this constituted ‘membershipping’; Relevance theory (cf. Chapter 4) operates on the same principle. Also, even with regard to instructions, what is relevant cannot be assumed to be universal (see Katan 1999/2004).

‘Context’ is a convenient if fuzzy term, first applied to translation by an anthropologist Malinowski, whose treatise, though focussing on ‘primitive’ cultures, is still relevant today. He studied the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands and their language, and noted that he would have to make a number of changes in translating their Kirwinian conversations into English. He used the following literal translation as an example: ‘We run front-wood ourselves; we paddle in place; we turn we see companion ours. He runs rear-wood behind their sea-arm Pilolu’. Malinowski realized that he would need to add
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a commentary for an outsider reader to make explicit the layers of meaning that would be implicit for the ‘Trobrianders, what Geertz would later call a ‘thick description’. In translation studies, this has now become popularised by Appiah (1993/2004) and Hermans (2003) as ‘thick translation’. First, a reader would need not only lexico-grammatical help to follow the story, but also ‘to be informed about the situation in which … words were spoken’ (Malinowski 1923/1938: 301), the ‘context of situation’. A version for outsiders might have sounded something like this:

In crossing the sea-arm of Pilolu (between the Trobriands and the Amphletts), our canoe sailed ahead of the others. When nearing the shore we began to paddle. We looked back and saw our companions still far behind, still on the sea-arm of Pilolu.

The extract now makes sense; and with more of the context, the extract may be viewed as part of a story that a Trobriander is telling while sitting round with a group of eager listeners, recounting the end of a day’s fishing trip.

However, to fully understand ‘what it is that is going on’ the reader would need to be aware ‘that language is essentially rooted in the reality of culture … the broader contexts of verbal utterance’ (Malinowski 1923/1938: 305), which Malinowski later called the ‘context of culture’ (1935/1967: 18; cf. Halliday and Hasan 1989: 47). Malinowski noted the use of two words in particular: ‘front-wood’, which contained ‘a specific emotional tinge only comprehensible against a background of their tribal ceremonial life, commerce and enterprise’, as in ‘top-of-the-range leading canoe’; and ‘paddle’, which here signals the fact that the sail is lowered as shallow water is reached. It now becomes clear that we are witnessing a triumphal recount of a fishing expedition which finished in a race to the shore and which by now is all but over.

Many scholars have since discussed and classified the context of situation, in particular Halliday and Hasan (and see also House 1997). But as Halliday and Hasan (1989: 47) themselves point out, very little had been done in terms of developing the context of culture, which we will now discuss.

5.2.2 LOGICAL TYPING

The anthropologist Bateson (1972: 289) noted that context, if it were to remain a useful concept, must be subject to what he called ‘logical typing’: ‘Either we must discard the notion of “context”, or we retain this notion and, with it, accept the hierarchic series – stimulus, context of stimulus, context of context of stimulus, etc.’ By logical typing he meant that each context represents a ‘type’ (such as the different context types of ‘situation’ and ‘culture’), and each ‘type’ frames, or logically informs, the next in a hierarchy of (often paradoxical) types. Goffman (1974) in Frame Analysis, explains that a frame tells us ‘What it is that is going on here’ Each frame contains its own reality
in much the same way as an area of black and white stripes on a white wall may be called a painting when framed. The labelling of the frame (e.g., ‘Night and Day’) affects our interpretation. If we then frame the whole exhibition as ‘Reflections on Prison’ we change perspective, and understand more of what it is that is going on (according to the exhibition organizer).

We can now move back to the competing definitions of culture and present them as essential parts of a unified model of culture or rather a system of frames which compete in their influence over what, when, how and why we translate.

5.2.3 THE LOGICAL LEVELS OF CULTURE

The levels themselves are based on aspects of NLP logical level theory (e.g., Dilts 1990; O’Connor 2001: 28–32) and the anthropological ‘iceberg model’, popularized in Hall’s ‘triad of culture’ (1959/1990). The logical levels serve to introduce one dimension of the system, dividing aspects of culture (the iceberg) into what is visible (above the waterline), semi-visible and invisible (Figure 5.1). The frames below the water line are progressively more hidden but also progressively closer to our unquestioned assumptions about

**Figure 5.1** The iceberg representation of culture (adapted from Katan 1999/2004: 43)
the world and our own (cultural) identities. A further, sociological, dimension may be described as operating on the iceberg itself.

The extent to which a translator should intervene (i.e. interpret and manipulate rather than operate a purely linguistic transfer) will be in accordance with beliefs about which frame(s) most influence translation. Translation scholars tend to focus on the more hidden levels, while practitioners are more concerned with what is visible on the surface (Katan 2009).

5.3 TECHNICAL CULTURE: SHARED ENCYCLOPAEDIC KNOWLEDGE

The first cultural frame is at the tip of the iceberg and coincides with the humanist concept of culture. The focus is on the text, dressed (adapting Newmark) in its best civilized clothes of a particular culture. At this ‘technical’ level the language signs have a clear WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) referential function, and any associated hidden values are universal. The task of the translator at this level is to transfer the terms and concepts in the source text abroad with minimum loss (from literature and philosophical ideas to software manuals), so that ‘what you get’ in the source text is equivalent to ‘what you get’ in the target text. As long as the two cultures ‘have reached a comparable degree of development’, there is no reason why meaning, reader response and uptake should not be universal (Seleskovich in Newmark, 1988: 6; see also Wilss 1982: 48).

This is what Newmark (1981: 184–5) called ‘the cultural value’ of translation, and indeed is embedded in the bylaws (2007) of the International Federation of Translators (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs, FIT): ‘to assist in the spreading of culture throughout the world’. The chapter headings in Translators through History (Delisle and Woodsworth 1995) give us an idea of what is involved: the invention of alphabets and the writing of dictionaries; the development of national languages and literatures, and the spread of religions and cultural values. Depending on the asymmetries of power, spreading the new terms and concepts might be perceived as enlightenment, ‘the white man’s burden’, an affront, the wielding of hegemony or a much-valued addition to intellectual debate.

5.3.1 CULTUREMES

However, the main concern of translators intervening at this level is the text itself and the translation of ‘culture-bound’ terms, for example ‘culturemes’: formalized, socially and juridically embedded phenomena that exist in a particular form or function in only one of the two cultures being compared (Vermeer in Nord 1997: 34 and Nord 2000: 214). These ‘cultural categories’ (Newmark, 1988: 95, after Nida) cover a wide array of semantic fields: from
geography and traditions to institutions and technologies. Scholars since Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) have offered a plethora of strategies to compensate for the lack of culture equivalence. Kwieciński (2001: 157) has summarized these into four groups: ‘exoticising procedures’, ‘rich explicatory procedures’, ‘recognised exoticisation’ and ‘assimilative procedures’. See also Pederson’s (2008: 103) clear overview of ‘Extralinguistic Culture-Bound Reference Transfer Strategies’ in subtitling.

‘Exoticising procedures’ allow the foreign term into the target language (falafel, macho, Weltanschauung, burka). For Newmark (e.g. 1988: 82), this procedure offers local colour and atmosphere, though this approach has been criticized by Berman (1985/2004: 286), who claims that making a text ‘more authentic’ (the inverted commas are his) insidiously emphasizes and exoticizes a certain stereotype. Clearly, we need to be aware of the difference between the utility of the resources available for a translator and the slavish use of any one irrespective of context or translation purpose.

The second grouping is ‘rich explicatory procedures’. The aim is to slide in an extra term or two which will cue readers to enough of the context, often through a local analogy, to guide them towards a more equivalent cognition. Two of the many possible procedures are the use of explanatory brackets, such as ‘Knesset (the Israeli Parliament)’, or through adjectivizing the source term, as in ‘hot cotechino sausage’. Newmark, amongst others (e.g. Nida 1975), suggests the need here for componential analysis to analyse the semantic properties, connotations or culture-bound components of terms in the SL and the TL.

When, where and how to explicate depends on the translator’s acute sensitivity to reader uptake. The following Harry Potter translation into French by Ménard is a good example of a translator’s balanced membership decisions (shown here in bold):

Viewers as far apart as Kent, Yorkshire and Dundee have been phoning in (Rowling 1997a: 12)

Des téléspectateurs qui habitent dans des régions aussi éloignées les unes des autres que le Kent, le Yorkshire et la côte est de l’Écosse m’ont téléphoné (Rowling 1997b: 11)

[Viewers who live in regions as distant from one other as Kent, Yorkshire and the east coast of Scotland have phoned me].

The third grouping is ‘recognized exoticism’. Some well-known geographical and personal names and titles have ‘accepted translations’ according to language: Geneva (English) is Genève (French), Genf (German) or Ginevra (Italian), not to be confused with Genova, which is Italian for the English Genoa. The Italian painter Tiziano Vecelli changes to Titian only in English; Charlemagne (French) is Karl der Große (German), Carlo Magno (Italian) and either Charlemagne or Charles the Great (English); and La Gioconda (Italian) is the Mona Lisa. There are more exceptions than rules concerning exoticism,
and ‘recognition’ is not only debatable but also ever changing. Thirty years ago the English used to holiday in Apulia while Italians went to Nuova York. Today they go to Puglia or New York. Americans, however, still prefer Apulia. So the translator will always need to check how recognized the exoticism is.

Finally, ‘assimilative’ procedures transform text from the original into close functionally equivalent target terms, or it is even deleted if not considered central. So, premier ministre and presidente del gobierno are French and Spanish cultural equivalents of prime minister, even though their powers and responsibilities are not exactly the same. And the same goes for equivalent idioms. As Nida and Taber note (1969/74: 4) white as egret’s feathers may be as effective as ‘white as snow’ as long as ‘snow’ is not a leitmotif in itself in the target language. Alternatively, a translator can decide to ‘reduce to sense’, which would reduce the evocative power of the simile to a more prosaic description, as in very, very white. The fact, though, that partial or even complete equivalents exist does not in itself mean that assimilation or domestication is the best translation strategy. Like all the other procedures above, they form part of the resources available from which a translator may choose.

5.3.2 ALLUSIONS

While still at the level of shared context, we move away from the ‘seeing’ part of WYSIWYG to more context-based communication, such as Leppihalme’s ‘key-phrase allusions’, which include clichés and proverbs (e.g. ‘Apparently taxis all turn into pumpkins at midnight’). She proposes ‘a metacultural capacity’ (1997: 20), one that is able to comprehend ‘the extralinguistic knowledge of the source language culture’ and which can also ‘take into account the expectations and background knowledge of potential TT readers’. In fact, Akira Mizuno (in Kondo and Tebble, 1997), a practising broadcast interpreter in Japan, states that translation of popular culture presents one of the greatest challenges to Japanese broadcasters. He gives a list of some recurring American favourites which have caused him the most difficulty to translate for his Japanese audience. These include, for example, ‘Superman’, ‘the tooth fairy’ and ‘Kilroy was here’.

Not all allusions have such clear exophoric and exportable referents, but rather carry with them ‘cultural baggage’, opening up frames or schemata more specifically related to what is appropriate or valued in a particular culture, which we shall look at now.

5.4 FORMAL CULTURE: FUNCTIONALIST, APPROPRIATE PRACTICES

Hall’s second, ‘formal’, level of culture is part of the anthropological definition, usually described in terms of what is normal or appropriate. This floats under the visible part of the iceberg because appropriacy and normality are rarely formally taught. They are more fuzzy concepts and only
come to our notice when they are absent or performed maladroitly. As Agar (2006: 5) explains: ‘Culture becomes visible only when differences appear’. Many translation scholars have taken up Bhabha’s (1994) Location of Culture as the space ‘in between’ as a stock metaphor for translation (e.g. Wolf 2000; but see Tymoczko 2003: 186–7 for a criticism).

Vermeer’s own definition, based on the first part of Goodenough’s (1957/1964: 36), belongs to this level: ‘Culture consists of everything one needs to know, master and feel, in order to assess where members of a society are behaving acceptably or deviantly in their various roles’ (in Snell-Hornby 2006: 55). According to Snell-Hornby, it is also accepted by German-speaking translators as ‘the standard’. Intervention at this level focuses on the skopos of the translation (Vermeer), and tailoring the translation according to reception in the target culture.

At this level of culture, linguistically we are no longer able to point to universal features that change label, or to culturemes that may require technical explication, but, as Sapir (1929/1958: 214) emphasized, ‘distinct worlds’. So, cultures, here, are plural, and texts require mediating rather than conduit translation. Though Leppihalme restricts the term ‘culture bumps’ to ‘the allusion [which] may remain unclear or puzzling’ (1997: 4), the ‘bump’ can apply to any communication problem. It was coined by Archer (1986) as a mild form of ‘culture shock’, which has been defined as the ‘emotional reactions to the disorientation that occurs when one is immersed in an unfamiliar culture and is deprived of familiar cues’ (Paige 1993: 2).

Two examples below demonstrate the real-world problem bumps of transferring ‘normal practice’ with the conduit approach. A 1996 fax2, written in English from a firm in Pakistan to a well-known Italian fashion house with the intent of becoming a supplier, began as follows:

Attn: [name and department]
I made samples for you in 1994 for the summer and we had received orders for about 20,000 blouses to be shipped in 1995 but due to a plague in our country these orders were cancelled by you. The contact was made by (full name and full address).

This is not ‘the normal’ way to write a business letter of introduction in English. The introductory statement is too direct, personal and accusatory. Bentahila (2004) reports on a study of university students (Tetouan, Morocco) who used a similar more personal and emotive style to write a letter of application for study grants in the UK. Optimum relevance clearly comes from another local norm: 96 per cent, for example, expressed a desire to pursue personal ambitions (e.g. ‘I don’t exaggerate if I say that it is my dream’).

Clearly, texts with a persuasive function, as above, must be manipulated if they are to function persuasively in the target culture. As Nida (1997: 37) puts it: ‘Many translators believe that if they take care of the words and
grammar, the discourse will take care of itself, but this concept results from an insufficient understanding of the role of discourse structures in interlingual communication’. He continues by noting that it is the ‘intelligent secretaries in North America’ who know how to delete overtly complimentary statements from Latins, and to add appropriate expressions of greeting and friendship from their North American bosses. Otherwise Latinos will think that American businessmen will be reluctant to do business with Latinos who appear to be too flattering and insincere.

The fact that he does not mention translators is striking but belies a fundamental issue: who actually acts as a cultural mediator? The ‘translator’, paradoxically, does not have the freedom a secretary has to facilitate communication, due both to domestic fidelity-to-the-text norms and to the (limiting) beliefs that professional translators themselves have about their role.

Pragmatically speaking, a target reader is bound within an ‘environmental bubble’ (Cohen 1972: 177; Katan 2001) of his or her own normality, or model of the world, and in general can only have at most a technical understanding of another culture. If there is understanding of the formal level of culture, it will usually be an ethnocentric one (Bennett 1993, 1998; Katan 2001). As Chesterman (1997a: 54) informs us: ‘Norm flouters threaten normality, produce difference and are quickly ostracized or punished’.

Useful technically oriented communication preference models are now becoming available, thanks to the study of contrastive rhetoric (Connor 1996). These can help in the mediation between culture specific accepted practices (e.g. German/English, House 2003b: 31; Italian/English, Katan, 1999/2004: 261–2); see also Ventola (2000); Candlin and Gotti (2004).

As noted above regarding Nida’s comment, translation norms dictate the extent to which these models can be put into practice. Also, as descriptive translation studies have shown (Chesterman 1993; Toury 1995; Pym et al. 2008 amongst others), the rules and conventions guiding appropriate translation decisions are domestic rather than universal. They govern all translation practice, from decisions regarding which texts are acceptable or accepted for translation, to the type of translation and assimilation/compensation strategies to employ, and to the criteria by which a translation is judged.

5.5 INFORMAL CULTURE: COGNITIVE SYSTEMS AND VALUES

Hall’s third level of culture he terms ‘informal’ or ‘out-of-awareness’ because it is not normally accessible to the conscious brain for meta-cognitive comment, while, as we have seen, the formal level can be technically analysed and modelled. At the informal level, there are no formal guides to practice but instead unquestioned core values and beliefs, or stories about self and the world. As such, culture, inculcated, for example, though family, school
and the media, becomes a relatively fixed internal representation of reality, Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’, which then both guides and constrains an individual’s orientation in the real world.

Psychological anthropology defines culture in terms of a Weltanschauung: a shared model, map or view of the perceivable world (Korzybski 1933/1958); ‘mental programming’ (Hofstede 2001); ‘the form of things that people have in their mind’ (Goodenough 1957/1964: 36), which orients individual and community ways of perceiving and doing things. These are ‘core, primary ethical values’ (Chesterman 1997a: 149) and guide formal culture choices. Wierzbicka (1992: 63) gives an example of a Russian core value duša lacking in ‘the universe of Anglo-Saxon culture’. The repetition of the term in Vasily Grossman’s (1980) novel Zizn’i sud’ba, Life and Fate, is an essential feature of the ST. Yet the ‘faithful translation [“soul”] leads to an oddness for the target text reader’. Wierzbicka’s advice is to use other partial synonyms and/or eliminate some of the references to duša altogether.

However, not all interculturally-aware translation scholars agree with this form of active distortion of the form. For Venuti (1998a), the main issue is exactly the opposite: the loss of the foreign and an over-domestication, pandering to Anglo value systems. House, herself, warns against actively manipulating the culture filter for written language, particularly literature, as, in her view, the ST text form has its own ‘worth’ (and here mediators would agree); and also because ‘context cannot be regarded in translation as dynamic’ (2006: 343).

Nevertheless, readers at this level of culture will evaluate the use of language (behaviour) not so much in terms of ‘oddness’ of style but through attributing features of personality (identity) according to their own value system. The universal modelling filter here not only distorts the meaning of behaviour but also generalizes in terms of ‘type’. So, limited information about ‘the other’ easily slips into generalized negative stereotyping regarding type of person. The following text from Italo Calvino’s L’avventura di una moglie/The Adventure of a Wife (1993: 116) provides a good example (see Katan 2002). Stefania, the well-mannered wife, has just walked into ‘a bar’ for the very first time and goes up to the counter. Her very first move is to make the following bold request (highlighted):

Un ristretto, doppio, caldissimo, – disse al cameriere.
‘A concentrated, double, very hot’, she said to the man.

Initially, this foreignized translation will leave the Anglophone reader bewildered, as none of the words directly cue ‘coffee’. More serious is the fact that we have a projected directive, which the English language and cultural filters are likely to distort into a flouting of negative politeness norms; and Stefania’s unassuming behaviour (for an Italian addressee) is likely to be ‘typed’ as ‘brazen’ or ‘rude’.
Katan (2002) suggests a number of mediating strategies, including couching the projecting directive within an explicit request frame, thus leaving the politeness to the context so that there is no distortion of the target text within the projection. This will allow the readers (and, in reality, the barman too) to add the politeness from their own expectancy frame:

She asked the barman for an espresso, ‘thick, double and really hot’.

This solution allows the readers to glimpse, from the safety of their own environmental bubble, something of the foreignness of Italian directness in projected requests – without distorting the illocutionary intent. The choice of the foreignizing ‘thick, double’, rather than the domestic ‘large, strong’, takes the reader away from the domestic towards the look, feel, taste and aroma of an espresso. In so doing the reader is likely to experience a richer perlocutionary effect, and will have begun to learn something new.

At this level of culture, no word is entirely denotative. Hence, even seemingly technical words can have ‘cultural baggage’ attached to them according to readership. Bassnett (1980/2002: 18–19, 28–9), for example, notes how global products, such as butter, whisky and Martini, can change status and connotation once translated or transferred to a new readership, due to culture-bound practice differences. Díaz-Guerrero and Szalay (1991), furthermore, show how the same term can be associated with almost polar-opposite values and beliefs. Their free-association experiment demonstrated that Americans related United States to patriotism and government while Mexicans associated Estados Unidos with exploitation and wealth. As Allen (2000: 17), taking his cue from Bakhtin, puts it: ‘Meaning … is unique, to the extent that it belongs to the linguistic interaction of specific individuals or groups within specific social contexts’.

In monocultural communication, this ‘uniqueness’ does not usually require clarification of the performative, as Leech points out (1983: 174–5, 325). Intercultural communication mediators, on the other hand, will always need to consider how anchored the intended meaning is to its ‘specific social context’ and hence value system; and also how clear it is to the target reader that the meaning is framed within a different model of the world. The humble chrysanthemum, for example, has little specific connotation within the Anglo cultures, but strong symbolic meaning in most of the rest of the world. It is often the ‘flower of the dead’. So a text which states ‘These autumn classic chrysanthemums will make for a warm, wonderful feeling any time’, taken from an American catalogue, will need to have the speech act framed with a performative, which answers the question: ‘According to whom/which context?’, e.g. ‘In America …’, ‘As they say ….’ (See also Katan 1999, 1999/2004: 145–8).

Finally, the original writer’s individual stance is also likely to be distorted or simply deleted in translation through lack of astute membershiping of the
target reader. As Dillon (1992: 39–40) notes, insider and outsider reading will be very different because:

Insiders have large funds of special information about other relevant claims, received opinion, and previous positions of the writer, in addition, they have an interest in the matter under discussion: they themselves have positions against which they test the argument … they are in a position to evaluate what is said in terms of what is alluded to, obliquely touched on, or even unsaid.

5.5.1 CULTURAL GRAMMARS

Ethnographers have talked about the creation of a ‘cultural “grammar”’ (see Duranti 1997: 27; Goodenough in Risager 2006: 45), which Wierzbicka (1996: 527) describes as ‘a set of subconscious rules that shape a people’s ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and interacting’.

The values and beliefs that form the basis of the subconscious rules can be teased out in two particular ways, emically and etically. Wierzbicka’s emic ethnographic approach (e.g. 1996, 2006) is to spell out subjective beliefs about appropriacy using semantic universals to provide ‘cultural scripts’. The ‘universals’ contain a strictly limited use of language, free of cultural baggage, such as the adjectives ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Table 5.1 is an example of her analysis of the difference between the ‘vague, undefined’ Japanese ‘effacement’ and Anglo ‘self-enhancement’.

**Table 5.1** Japanese ‘effacement’ and Anglo ‘self-enhancement’ scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese ‘self-effacement’ script</th>
<th>Anglo ‘self enhancement’ script</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is good to often think something like this:</td>
<td>It is good to often think something like this:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I did something bad’</td>
<td>‘I did something very good’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often do things like this</td>
<td>I can do things like this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not everyone does things like this</td>
<td>Not everyone can do things like this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people don’t often do things like this’</td>
<td>Other people don’t often do things like this’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Wierzbicka (1996: 537).

Alternatively, either through ethnographic fieldwork or through extensive questionnaire research, attempts have been made to distil the subjective scripts into etic classifications to model the basic orientations, such as ‘self-effacement’. Kroeber and Kluckhuhn (1952) were the first to introduce value orientations, suggesting that there were a limited number of responses to universal human needs or problems and that cultures tended to prefer one response over another (for a summary see Katan 1999/2004).
E.T. Hall (1976/1989), for example, through his ‘contexting theory’, distinguished between a culture’s preference to communicate in a WYSIWYG way (‘low context’) or through more context-based channels (‘high context’). This general cline of preference helps to clarify the relative values of verbal/written contracts across cultures (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1983: 123–4), website design differences (Würtz 2005), the relative importance and detail of public signs (e.g. the ‘Caution HOT!’ take-away coffee cups – a necessity in low-context communication cultures) and, indeed, the Anglo concern for clarity in translation (Katan 1999/2004: 234).

In a study of insurance brochures offered by banks in Britain and Italy, Katan (2006) analysed the frequency of words that logically indicate orientation alternatives, as outlined by Hofstede (1991, 2001). The frequency of terms, appertaining for example, to ‘security/sicurezza’ and to ‘comfort/tranquillità’ was significantly different, as were the use of time markers and interrogatives/declaratives, to the extent that ‘Basically it would seem that the British reader is being sold an independent and comfortable life, whereas the Italian reader is being sold security and certainty’ (Katan 2006: 69).

See also Mooij’s (2004b) work on advertising, and Manca (forthcoming) for a corpus-driven perspective.

5.6 OUTSIDE THE ICEBERG: SOCIETAL POWER RELATIONS

Sociologists and cultural studies scholars focus on the influence of culture at the level of society, institutions and prevailing ideologies. Culture, here, is the result of the ‘pressures that social structures apply to social action’ (Jenks 1993: 25). These pressures mould, manipulate or conflict with the individual but shared models of the world discussed above.

There are two other fundamental differences compared to the pure anthropological model. First, individuals (and texts) cannot be assigned to ‘a culture’. This is seen as ‘essentialist’ (Green in Bhabha 1994: 4). Also, Verschueren (2003: 7) believes that ‘any attempt to compare cultures’ is ‘risky’, and believes that Hofstede’s ‘decontextualise[d] idealised parameters of variability’ are ‘a particularly deplorable example’. Wierzbicka (2006: 24) agrees, stating ‘there is no common, no set list of categories invented by the researcher and then “applied” to various human groups’. Instead individuals will have many cultural provenances. Within this frame of culture, the idea of a ‘useful simplified model of reality’, with neat ready-made classifications, begins to fall apart. Cultures are seen to be variously privileged or suppressed, and individuals will negotiate a position within a set of complex cultural systems jockeying for power. Within translation studies, scholars drawing on polysystem theory (e.g. Even-Zohar 1990/2004), postcolonial theory (e.g. Bassnett and Trivedi 1999) and narrative theory (e.g. Baker 2006) all share this assumption.

Secondly, the system in which the translator works is itself under question (as is the validity of cultural relativity). At this level, translators intervene
between competing (and unequal) power systems, no longer to facilitate but to take sides, aware that texts (and they themselves) are carriers of ideologies (Hatim and Mason 1997: 147). The decision to translate Salmon Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988) or *Did Six Million Really Die?* (Harwood 1977) are clear cases in point. The translator at this level is no longer a disassociated mediator but is conscious of being ‘an ethical agent of social change’ (Tymoczko 2003: 181), or ‘an activist’ involved in re-narrating the world (Baker 2006). In a similar vein, Venuti, for example, rails against *The Translator’s Invisibility* (Venuti 1995/2008), preferring to let the reader come into direct contact with the difference of ‘the other’. This stance, as he says, ‘stems partly from a political agenda … an opposition to the global hegemony of English’ (Venuti 1998a: 10), a hegemony that communicates and normalizes specific (e.g. capitalist, colonial) cultural values.

Intervention at this level obviously raises many ethical questions, but there is also clearly a fine practical line between a successful foreignized translation which resists the domestic generic conventions to introduce a new way of writing or way of thinking, and an unread translation because ‘even breaches of canonical storylines have to be effected within circumscribed, normative plots [i.e. formal culture] if they are to be intelligible at all’ (Baker 2006: 98). Also, many scholars confuse the utility of etic classifications designed to encourage mindshifting out of an ethnocentric mindset with mindless stereotyping, the opposite of what translation as intercultural communication represents.

Ultimately, though, culture has to be understood not only as a set of levels or frames but as an integrated system, in a constant state of flux, through which textual signals are negotiated and reinterpreted according to context and individual stance.

### 5.7 The Cultural Mediator

It is the mediator’s task to negotiate the various signals, contexts and stances. According to Taft:

> A cultural mediator is a person who facilitates communication, understanding, and action between persons or groups who differ with respect to language and culture. The role of the mediator is performed by interpreting the expressions, intentions, perceptions, and expectations of each cultural group to the other, that is, by establishing and balancing the communication between them. In order to serve as a link in this sense, the mediator must be able to participate to some extent in both cultures. Thus a mediator must be to a certain extent bicultural.
> 
> (Taft 1981: 53)

As Bennett (1993, 1998) makes clear, to be bicultural means having passed through a number of developmental stages towards ‘intercultural sensitivity’.

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One of the later stages is termed ‘contextual evaluation’, which is at the same competence level as Pym’s (2003) definition of translation: ‘the ability to generate a series of more than one viable TT [and] the ability to select only one viable TT from this series quickly and with justifiable confidence’.

To ‘select’, the mediator will need to ‘“mindshift” cultural orientation’ (Taft 1981: 53); to be able to do this, a mediator needs another point of reference. This is known in NLP as the ‘third perceptual position’ (DeLozier & Grinder, 1987; O’Connor, 2001: 33–4; Katan 2001, 2002), disassociated from both the contexts of the ST and from those of the virtual TT. From this third position the mediator (informed also by the other stakeholders in the translation process) can ‘objectively’ manipulate the text.

Of course, Hatim and Mason (1997) and Baker (2006), amongst others, are entirely correct to suggest that mediators feed their own (and are fed) knowledge and beliefs into the processing of the texts. However, the beliefs we are principally concerned with here are of a different ‘type’; not those of a mediator’s ideological position but rather beliefs about the (communicative) needs inherent between texts and their readers. Compare the work of Gutt (1991/2000) from a relevance theory perspective (see Chapter 4).

Table 5.2 below shows how the various ‘types’ frame each other. It is a logical levels table that asks at each level what it is that is going on within the context of culture and in that particular context of situation.

**Table 5.2 Logical levels table of context of culture and context of situation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>What is going on?</th>
<th>Potential differences to be accounted for in the text</th>
<th>Potential differences to be accounted for between cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Environment** | Where and when is this ‘going on’?  
Where and when is this ‘going on’, in what context of situation? | Lexicogrammatical resources, genre, intertextual links, specialized language | Physical, political, social environment: period, people, setting, artefacts; culturemes, encyclopaedic knowledge, allusions, culture bumps |
| **Behaviour** | What is it that is ‘going on’?  
What is to be translated? | Semantics: visible text, locution, cohesion | Visible action/ descriptions: (non) verbal behaviour, proxemics |

Continued
Table 5.2 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are these things ‘going on’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it to be translated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatics: illocutionary intent/force, register, organization of discourse, house rules, individual style, coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication preferences: development of ideas, spoken/written styles, habits, customs; Norms, appropriacy, rules; linguaculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Values |
| Values |
| Beliefs |
| Why are these things ‘going on’? |
| What is the purpose of the translation? |
| Intentions: message, hidden message, assumptions, presuppositions |
| The hierarchy of preferred value-orientations: Beliefs about identity and about what is ‘right’ ‘standard’ or ‘normal’ |

| Identity |
| Who is involved in this ‘going on’? |
| - original author |
| - reader(ships) |
| - commissioner |
| - translator as copier/ manipulator |
| Actors in the text: personalities, animated subjects, |
| National, ethnic, gender, religious, class, role; individual personality and cultural provenance(s) |

| Role, mission in society |
| Is this ‘going on’ coherent with my role/mission and the relevant social forces? |
| How do I need to act with regard to the social forces? |
| Text as agent of change or status quo: esteem, ethics (of actors), long-term perlocutionary effects |
| The social forces. power issues: hegemonies, ideologies; moral issues, professional issues |

The first two columns delineate the frame at which intervention will take place, directing the mediator through specific questions to the focus at that level. The third and fourth columns consider the (source and target) texts, contexts of culture and situation, and show which aspects of culture are relevant at each level.

To a large extent, the table synthesizes the discussion of the iceberg and the forces acting on it. So, for example, when translating a text, all translators will...
need to have an idea of the type of text they have to translate and what culture-bound features it may manifest. They will then, at the level of ‘behaviour’, need to account for ‘what it is that is going on’, the sense immanent in the individual sentences. Moving away from technical culture to the formal, the mediator becomes concerned with appropiarity: how the text has been written and how the text operates (or might operate) in the target culture. At the level of ‘values and beliefs’, mediators, taking the third perceptual position, will focus on the out-of-awareness levels of culture: what beliefs and values are implicitly carried by the ST, how these are likely to be filtered by the intended target reader; and what the (likely) intentions of the ST author were compared to the actors involved in the translation. In short, ‘why are these things going on?’ Hence, at the level of identity we have a variety of actors involved, both within and outside the text, who embody a cluster of values and/or beliefs which will favour a set of text strategies, visible as the text itself, produced within a particular environment. At this level of ‘identity’, the mediator will take into account the needs or requirements of the other actors, such as the ST author, commissioner and intended reader; and last, but not least, the mediator’s own beliefs about how to mediate.

Finally, the level of ‘mission’ is concerned with the way roles relate to society and how translating affects the status quo, and questions the profession itself. It answers the larger more existential question as to ‘why’ the mediator should decide to accept (or not) a particular commission at a particular time, and what it is that has guided an individual to act as a mediator. This level, too, brings into question the whole system within which power relations, roles, values, strategies and behaviours underpinning intercultural communication are sanctified.

5.8 Conclusion

To conclude, translation as intercultural communication requires treating the text itself as only one of the cues of meaning. Other, ‘silent’, ‘hidden’ and ‘unconscious’ factors, which when shared may be termed cultural, determine how a text will be understood. In translating, a new text will be created which will be read according to a different map or model of the world, through a series of different set of perception filters. Hence the need to mediate. The translator should be able to model the various worlds, through, for example, the Logical Levels model, and by switching perceptual positions gain a more complete picture of ‘What it is that is, could or should be, going on’.

Notes

1 This chapter is a much expanded version of the author’s ‘translation as culture’ entry in Baker and Saldanha (2008).
2 In my personal possession.
3 These terms were coined by Pike (Headland et al. 1990) to distinguish the unframed, subjective and personal (emic) from the framed (etic) typing or classification. The etic approach will be the result of (ideally) objective and generalized empirical study.