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## Introducing Multidimensional Translation

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### Abstract

The following article is a revised and updated version of the opening address to the first event of the Marie Curie conference series 'Multidimensional Translation' (MuTra) held on May 2nd, 2005 in Saarbrücken. It describes the concept and methodology of Multidimensional Translation as a research project proposed to and accepted for funding by the European Union. The EU's generous financial support made it possible to develop the topic as described below and provide momentum to a research area in intercultural communication transfer which integrates the disparate subfields of audiovisual translation, audiodescription, theater translation, knowledge management & LSP translation and various types of interpreting within a framework of a common theoretical profile. My special thanks go to the European Union for making this possible and to all contributors of this conference on translation in its multidimensional forms.

## 1 The Setting

### 1.1 Translation Theory: A Historical Perspective

Translation has a centuries-long tradition and has historically raised many complex and controversial scientific questions in a number of disciplines (for an overview cf. George Steiner 1992). In theology (Bible translation) the 'literal' versus 'free' issue was raised as early as Jerome (395), has proceeded to Luther (1530) and Buber (1954) and is still a topic in today's 'translation science' (Nida 1964, Berger/Nord 1999). In literary studies, the issue of fidelity in translation has traditionally played a prominent role (Schleiermacher 1813, Benjamin 1923). In addition, in the field of literary history, descriptive translation studies have examined the status and function of translations in the target culture (Even-Zohar 1978, Toury 1995). In philosophy the controversy over the relationship between language and thought and the world's cultural interpretation led to the development of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and Humboldt's untranslatability thesis (Sapir 1968, Whorf 1956, Humboldt 1836). More recently, deconstruction has questioned the very notion of an original, as well as the belief in equivalence or fidelity (Derrida 1985). In semiotics interlingual translation forms part of the wider field of translation between any two sign systems (Jakobson 1959). Translation-relevant issues in semiotics include the nature of signs and codes (Peirce 1991, Eco 1975, 1984), and the relationship between different complex signs (Gorlée 1994). In anthropology the question of the translatability of cultures – translatability between different (and differentially empowered) cultures and languages, and between different discursive modes (from a way of life into academic discourse) – has been widely debated (Asad 1986, Clifford 1988,

Pálsson 1993). The issues of power, representation and translatability recur in postcolonial cultural studies (Bhabha 1994, Greenblatt 1991). Intercultural communication studies deals with both verbal and nonverbal communication between cultures (Clyne 1994, Gudykunst/Kim 1992, Göhring 2002). With the resulting diversity of solutions, comments and opinions from within these separate disciplines, it is natural that translation research has developed heterogeneously, dependent upon each discipline's explanatory models.

## 1.2 Modern Developments

With the rising need for international cooperation in politics, science and economics and the ensuing foundation of international organizations after WW II, language and cultural mediation in the form of translation and interpreting became an important international factor and modern translation research established itself as a discipline of its own. The attempt to simulate translation processes by machine translation in the fifties gave rise to important questions on the lexical and syntactical level of language transfer and subsequently positioned translation within the field of applied linguistics. When machine translation failed to produce the expected results, a 'human' translation science began to develop in the sixties relying on the categories and paradigms of general, applied and contrastive linguistics (Catford 1965, Wilss 1977, Koller 1979) and the authors of the so-called 'Leipzig school' (Kade 1968, Jäger 1975, Neubert 1968) and – with a communicative orientation – also Nida (1964)). In opposition to this 'linguistic' orientation a literature-based historico-descriptive paradigm developed, represented by the works of Kloepfer (1967), Kelly (1979), and the 'Göttinger Sonderforschungsbereich' (e.g. Kittel 1988).

Rejecting both paradigms as too philology-oriented, a functional translation school developed in the eighties placing the *skopos* of a translation in the center of attention (Reiss & Vermeer 1984, Holz-Mänttari 1984, Nord 1988, Snell-Hornby 1988). While this school made a major contribution towards establishing translation science as a discipline of its own, it still needs to clarify its concepts and methodologies and is today primarily accepted by translation practitioners as relevant for pragmatic texts. As a result of its heterogeneous historical development and its deep roots in practice, translation theory and research today presents itself as highly fragmented and compartmentalized.

## 1.3 Today's Challenges

As a practical phenomenon, translation & interpreting is a key global activity today and sets the stage for cross-cultural knowledge transfer and intercultural communication. It is of particular urgency in the world's largest and most prestigious employer of translators and interpreters, the European Union where translation and interpreting services have increased from 110 language combinations before enlargement on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 to 462 language combinations.. As was highlighted by the 2004 SCIC (*Service Commun Interprétation Conférences*) Universities Conference, the boundaries between translation, interpreting and multilingual communication are becoming increasingly blurred and multidimensional language competencies (including technology and (project) management skills) are required to meet modern multilingual communication challenges in an enlarging Europe.

Against the background of a fragmented (research) profile with little cross-fertilization between its multiple dimensions of intralingual (LSP communication), interlingual translation (translation between national languages) and intersemiotic translation (e.g. audiovisual translation), new technologies have transformed one-dimensional translation tasks (spoken-to-spoken/written-to-written modes) into

multidimensional (i.e. multilingual, multimedia, multimodal and/or polysemiotic) communication scenarios.

Modern translation tasks typically cut across the interlingual, intralingual and polysemiotic categorizations, potentially involving knowledge management and text (e.g. terminology management and website localization), linear to non-linear (e.g. 'hypertext'), spoken to written (e.g. subtitling or written interpreting), auditory to visual (subtitling for the hard-of-hearing), visual to auditory (audiodescription for blind audiences), spoken to manual symbols (sign language interpreting). The challenges of modern (multimedia) technologies and their impacts on the form, content, structures and modes of modern translation are still not yet fully known although language technology & knowledge representation (e.g. Schubert 2003, Budin 2002, Dam/Engberg/Geryzmisch-Arbogast 2005), electronic textuality and multimodal translation scenarios are today intrinsically interrelated with such translation subfields as LSP communication and audiovisual translation.

What are the implications of this development for the discipline of translation in its theoretical and practical dimensions? Can the impact of globalization and new technologies on the form, content, structure and modes of a translated product be identified and systematized? Will it enhance theoretical consolidation and lead to a coherent translation research profile or will it continue to lead to compartmentalization and eventually disintegration of the discipline? Can we establish a common theoretical ground for translation as a discipline within which research progress will promote the discipline as a whole, in which theory and practice are mutually beneficial to each other?

## 2 Multidimensional Translation: Concept and Methodology

We approach these questions from a theoretical perspective with a view to translation practice and argue that despite its heterogeneous development translation theory has considerably honed its research profile in the past 20 years to the extent that with the concept of *multidimensional translation* there is indeed a common theoretical ground as a resource from which translation practice in all its dimensions can draw support and benefit in an effort to meet the challenges of modern translation tasks. *Multidimensional Translation* proceeds from the idea that there is unity in a common (theoretical) core in all translation (processes), no matter how complicated and varied the languages in question, their textual structures or the media by which they are transmitted may be. They all require

- source material, e.g. knowledge and text (in the widest sense),
- to be 'transferred' to
- another material, e.g. another knowledge (system) or text (in its widest sense)

irrespective of whether the translated product is in the same (national) language or not, written, spoken, or signed, in linear or non-linear form, technology-driven and multimedia-supported or not.

Beyond this conceptual common ground, the following common traits are suggested to apply to all human translation procedures, i.e. that

- texts need to be understood before they are translated (which requires world knowledge, individual understanding being secured by text analysis)
- translation implies a 'transfer' from one of at least two cultures, languages, modes and/or sign systems (in the widest sense) to another and that
- text production in the target culture, language, mode and/or sign system requires re-formulation according to a set of parameters to be specified in the individual scenario.

The research program portrayed in Section 3 proceeds from the idea that from this theoretical basis a common translation methodology can be developed.

## 2.1 Conceptual Foundations

Translation theory, which – following the ‘Leipzig School’ terminology - traditionally includes both forms (written translation and oral interpretation) defines its object in a stricter and wider sense with transfer being performed e.g. on ‘language’ (Jacobson 1959, Koller 1972), ‘texts’ (Catford 1965), ‘messages’ (Nida/Taber 1969) or ‘information offers’ (Reiß/Vermeer 1984).

Catford (1965:20)	„Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) [source language] by equivalent textual material in another language (TL) [target language].“
Koller (1972:69)	„Linguistisch kann die Übersetzung als Umkodierung oder Substitution beschrieben werden: Elemente $a_1, a_2, a_3$ des Sprachinventars $L_1$ werden durch Elemente $b_1, b_2, b_3$ des Sprachinventars $L_2$ ersetzt.“
Jakobson (1959:233)	„1) Intralingual translation or <i>rewording</i> is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. 2) Interlingual translation or <i>translation proper</i> is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. 3) Intersemiotic translation or <i>transmutation</i> is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.“
Nida & Taber (1974:12)	„Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.“
Reiß & Vermeer (1991:119)	„Ein Translat ist ein Informationsangebot in einer Zielkultur und -sprache über ein Informationsangebot aus einer Ausgangskultur und -sprache.“

Fig. 1: Translation Concepts<sup>1</sup>

Despite the diversity in the objects of translatory action, all of these translation concepts involve a transfer as the *differentia specifica* of translation. Transfer can thus be considered the common core of any translatory action. If we keep the objects of translatory action relatively open, the following translation concept can accommodate a wide range of translation types from hypertext to subtitling:

Translation in its widest sense can be understood as

- a concern/interest of a speaker or writer which is expressed
- by means of a sign system 1
- formulated in a Medium 1 (= original)

and which is made understandable

- for a hearer or reader
- with a specific purpose
- by means of a sign system 2
- formulated in a medium 2 or in several media 3, 4, 5 (= translation)

<sup>1</sup> This overview is taken from Karger, Noemi (2005): Untertiteling – Übersetzung oder Bearbeitung. Universität des Saarlandes (unpublished)

Based on this general concept of translation, *Multidimensional Translation* can be defined as a form of translation which transfers – with a specific purpose – a speaker or hearer’s concern expressed in a sign system 1, formulated in a medium 1, via the same medium or a medium 2 or a combination of media into another sign or semiotic system 2.

Key components in this definition are that the concern needs to be expressed (as the basis of any translatory action), that the transfer is made with a specific purpose in mind and potentially involves a change of sign or semiotic system and/or mode or media. With this understanding of multidimensional translation it is possible to accommodate and describe a transfer from the spoken to the written (e.g. subtitling), from the written to the spoken (e.g. sight translation) from the visual to the spoken (e.g. audiodescription) and many other hybrid forms of translation and interpretation under the umbrella *multidimensional translation*. It is a research desideratum to describe the conditions and forms of the different types of multidimensional translation.

## 2.2 The Methodological Ground

If we proceed from the traditional three-phase translation model of analysis, transfer and restructuring (Nida/Taber 1969, 33) and adapt it for our purposes into partially interrelated reception, transfer and (re)production phases (Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2002, 26; 2003, 130 ff.; 2005, 36)<sup>2</sup>, certain methodological operations in all these three phases can be formulated in an abstract form that is applicable to all language combinations, all text types, and all translation modes.

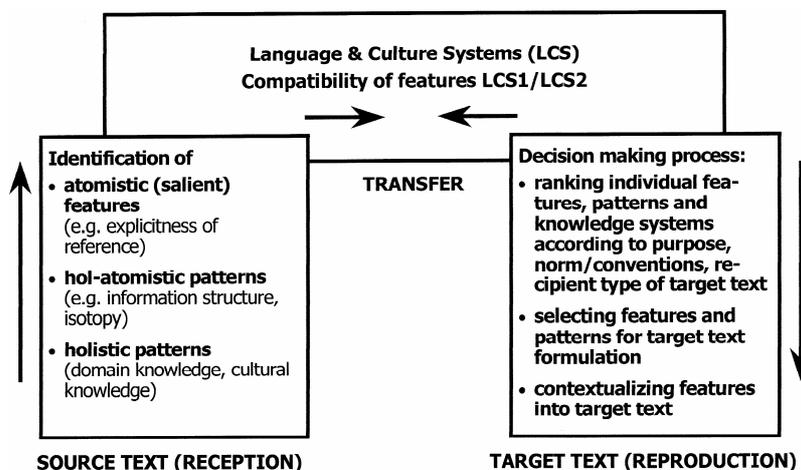


Fig. 2: Overlapping Translation Process Phases

<sup>2</sup> These principles have been formulated as a coherent step-by-step translation methodology in Gerzymisch-Arbogast/Mudersbach 1998 and are extensively exemplified (e.g. Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2002, 2005 a and b) They are therefore not repeated here.

They involve

- bottom-up text analysis with text-individual ‘salient’ features (identifiable on an atomistic, hol-atomistic and holistic level),
- comparative compatibility analysis during transfer on all three levels,
- intersubjective verifiability and weighted decision-making as guiding principles,
- potential variability with respect to purpose, norm, text type, recipient type and (transparent) translator’s preferences.

### **2.3 The Reception Phase: Text Analysis**

In contrast to most other existing translational text analysis methods, which proceed from an a priori established category roster and do not allow for the systematic description of ad hoc individual text features or idiosyncrasies (e.g. Nord 1988), it is suggested for multidimensional translation tasks – as a general principle – to analyze texts more flexibly in a bottom-up fashion according to their individual (‘salient’) features.<sup>3</sup> Bottom-up analyzable text features are identifiable as three different text perspectives (with different representations and potential visualizations), i.e. from an atomistic, hol-atomistic and holistic text perspective (cf. Geryzmisch-Arbogast/Mudersbach 1998, Geryzmisch-Arbogast 2002, 2005a and b).

### **2.4 The Transfer Phase: Comparative Compatibility Analysis**

Compatibility analysis verifies whether the (implied) text features (identified from an atomistic, holistic and hol-atomistic perspective in text analysis) are compatible with the target ‘material’ in content, form, structure and mode.<sup>4</sup>

The resulting (partial) incompatibilities will raise translation problems that need to be solved when re-formulating the target product (reproduction phase). They are today accessible in a systematized form mostly from an atomistic perspective (e.g. as lexical problems, cf. Koller’s 1:0 correspondence and the procedures for closing lexical gaps in translation). The MuTra project is designed to engage in further research into both hol-atomistic and holistic perspectives with a variety of text types and translation modes, placing particular emphasis on the holistic dimension of cultural constellations (Floros 2003) and knowledge management and information structures in LSP transfer (e.g. simultaneous interpreting as in Geryzmisch-Arbogast/Will (2005).

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<sup>3</sup> This, of course, does not mean that linguistic and/or other collective categories are not valid at all but does mean that text analysis should not be restricted to pre-established categories and needs to be flexible enough to accommodate singular text features too, e.g. typographical idiosyncrasies or innovative categories, e.g. speaker-hearer relationships.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of analyses are available on all these levels for a variety of text and translation types, the most comprehensive description of transfer modalities can be found in Floros’ dissertation on (cultural) constellations in texts and their translation (Floros 2003).

## 2.5 The (Re)Production Phase: Intersubjectivity and Weighted Decision-Making

With source text understanding (reception phase) and target culture compatibility (transfer phase) secured, the following principles are suggested to apply to all translatable action:

- Translation decisions cannot be made ‘objectively’, but they can be made transparent to others. The strongest research criterion ‘objectivity’ therefore needs to be replaced by ‘intersubjective transparency’ of translation decisions.
- Translation cannot reflect all features of the original. Only a selection of features (identified by text analysis) can be transferred to the target product. Translation therefore requires decision-making. Consistent decision-making – in contrast to intuitive ad hoc decisions - requires a ranking of features identified in text analysis with respect to the priority in which they are to be realized in the target product (weighted decision-making).
- Decisions in the reformulation process are at least governed by the parameters of ‘purpose’, ‘recipient type’ and ‘norms/conventions’ of the target product. Their interplay needs to be made transparent.

These principles allow for a translator’s individuality (subjectivity, creativity) but support him/her in making reasonable and consistent decisions. They also allow for individual variants in text formulation and account for the fact that a source text may have different target versions which may all be ‘correct’ but reflect different discursive modes, different purposes or simply different translators’ preferences.

On this basis, the discipline of translation can be considered to offer a coherent conceptual and methodological profile of *multidimensional translation*.

## 3 Multidimensional Translation: The MuTra Project

### 3.1 The Scientific Program

The MuTra research project addresses the multiple (multilingual, multimedia, multimodal and polysemiotic) dimensions of modern translation scenarios and raises questions as to the impact of new technologies on the form, content, structure and modes of translated products. It integrates research in cross-cultural knowledge management, LSP communication and audiovisual translation into translation theory with the objective of strengthening the research profile of translation.

The project’s objective is to 1) to draw attention to and promote research in the common ground or core translation components under the multiple conditions and constraints of multidimensional translation and interpreting, 2) to strengthen the research profiles of traditional concepts of translation and interpretation by providing qualitative research into various types of multidimensional translation, i.e. LSP communication or audiovisual translation, especially by research into the interplay of textual parameters such as coherence, information sequencing, isotopic continuity among others, 3) to apply coherent and consistent translation and interpreting methodologies to multidimensional translation and 4) to train young researchers in the respective research and training methods to enhance their professional and research competence as language and cultural experts and translators.

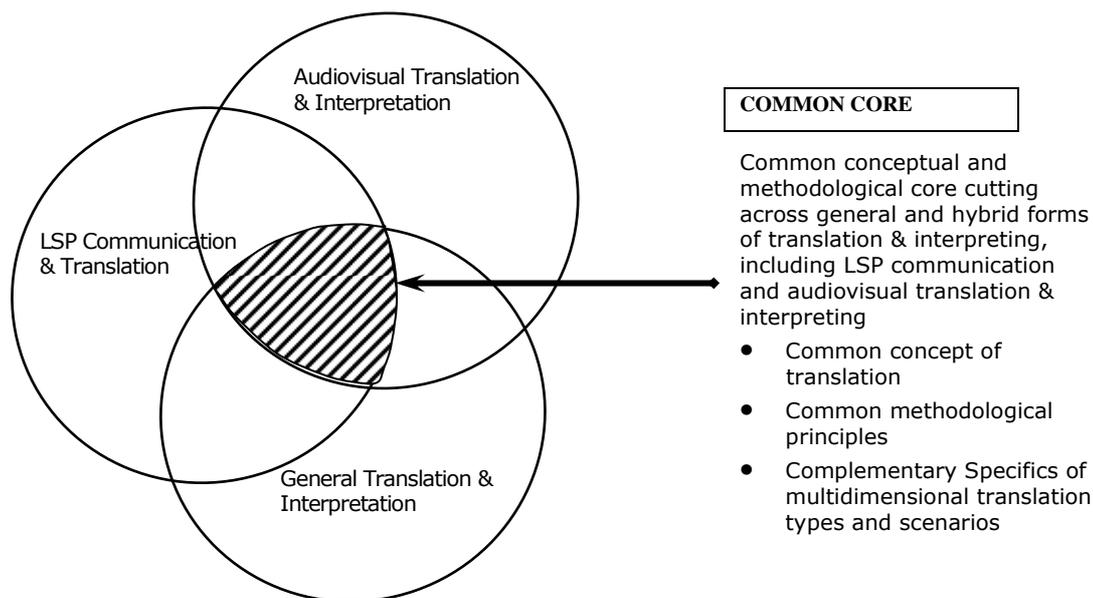


Fig 3: Common Core of MuTra

In the course of this research project, the *Advanced Translation Research Center (ATRC)* together with its partners in the scientific committee<sup>5</sup> organizes three large international Marie Curie high-level-scientific conferences for young and more experienced researchers in the field and one intensive PhD training course on *Multidimensional Translation* in Saarbrücken 2005, Copenhagen 2006 and Vienna 2007 (for details cf. [www.euroconferences.info](http://www.euroconferences.info)).

The conference contributions will be published as conference proceedings under [www.euroconferences.info](http://www.euroconferences.info) (Proceedings). Contributions which address the above-mentioned research profile in concept and/or methodology will be published as a consolidated volume by TC Publishing online ([www.translationconcepts.org](http://www.translationconcepts.org)) and in book form at the end of the conferences series in 2007.

The conference series is coherent in that all events 1) discuss multidimensional translation as a theoretical framework for modern hybrid translation and interpretation tasks, 2) complement each other in that each applies the common core theoretical and methodological framework to different types of multidimensional translation, i.e. multidimensional translation theory as a challenge (Event A, Saarbrücken, with PhD training activity Event D), audiovisual translation scenarios (Event B, Copenhagen with integrated PhD tutorial) and LSP translation scenarios (Event C, Vienna with integrated Ph tutorial).

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<sup>5</sup> The partners of the project under the leadership of the ATRC (Prof. Dr. Heidrun Gerzymisch-Arbogast) are (in alphabetical order) Prof. Dr. Gerhard Budin/University of Vienna, Prof. Dr. Jan Engberg/The Aarhus Business School and Prof. Dr. Klaus Schubert/University of Applied Sciences, Flensburg, Prof. Dr. Valda Rudziša/University of Ventspils, Prof. Dr. Henrik Gottlieb/University of Copenhagen, Prof. Dr. Kristina Szabari/University of Budapest. These partners are supported intersectorially in the area of subtitling (Mary Carroll, owner of Titelbild GmbH, Berlin) and project management (Jörg Scherer, owner of Eurice GmbH, Saarbrücken).

### **3.2 Research Areas and Perspectives**

The coherent conceptual and methodological framework of the MuTra project will open up new research by:

- establishing technological support for bottom-up salient features' text analyses on an atomistic, hol-atomistic and holistic level to facilitate processes in the reception phase (cf. above);
- conceptualizing and implementing knowledge/cultural data banks for facilitating comparative analyses in the transfer phases (cf. above);
- integrating multimedia and technological support description and influences into translation decision-making processes in the reproduction phase (cf. above) of multidimensional translation scenarios, e.g. securing consistency and transparency of decision-making with a given translational purpose and including multimedia visualizations for depicting and illustrating the interplay of interrelated textual parameters (e.g. coherence, information sequencing, isotopies) with computer assistance
- providing young researchers with systematic methodological training in translation decision-making processes and its application to a wide range of (hybrid) text and translation types and scenarios (general-pragmatic, LSP and audiovisual translation scenarios)
- integrating the results of the present project into current academic curricula developments (e.g. university courses in audiovisual translation, audiodescription, LSP communication etc.)
- complementing other research initiatives in the field of multidimensional translation.

New horizons for research include the following areas:

- all traditional translation and interpreting scenarios that are media-supported, including
  - ➔ Spoken – Transfer to – Spoken  
(generally all kinds of traditional interpreting with the exception of sight translation and note-triggered consecutive interpreting)
  - ➔ Written – Transfer to – Written  
(generally all kinds of written intralingual und interlingual translation)
  - ➔ Spoken (plus additional media requirement/support) – Transfer to - Spoken (plus additional media requirement/support)  
(e.g. synchronization, voice over, live subtitling, media interpreting)
  - ➔ Written (plus additional media requirement/support) – Transfer to – Written (plus additional media requirement/support)  
(e.g.(Website)-Localization, Hypertext-Translation, Script Translation).
- all translation and interpreting scenarios which involve a change in the mode of presentation (e.g. written to oral or vice versa as in sight translation or subtitling), including
  - ➔ Written – Transfer to – Spoken  
(e.g. free commentary, theater translations, sight translation)
  - ➔ Spoken – Transfer to – Written  
(e.g. subtitling, written interpretation)
- all translation and interpreting dimensions that involve a change in the sign system (e.g.. visual to oral as in audio-description or spoken to signs as in sign language interpreting)

- Spoken – Transfer to – Visual/Symbols  
(e.g. note-driven consecutive interpreting, sign-language interpreting)
- Visual/Symbols – Transfer to – Spoken  
(e.g. consecutive interpreting as verbalizing notational text symbols, audiodescription)
- Visual/Symbols – Transfer to – Written  
(e.g. written sign language, transforming pictures/imagines into text, translation of comics, video game localizations)
- Written – Transfer – Visual/Symbols  
(visualizations of text<sup>6</sup>, pictograms, Braille)
- Visual/Symbols – Transfer to – Visual/Symbols  
(international (electronic) advertising, infotainment)<sup>7</sup>

Specifically, the following sample research questions – among others – lend themselves for being addressed and empirically investigated:

- Are the reduction strategies developed in simultaneous interpretation valid instruments when it comes to text condensation requirements in subtitling (for the hard of hearing) and written interpretation? How do the two dimensions differ in coherence-establishing processes in terms of a priority for local and/or global coherence?
- Do the expansion strategies developed in consecutive interpretation lend themselves for application in audiodescription?
- In what way and to what an extent can the narrative techniques of literary translation be of value to audiodescription techniques?
- In what way could localization procedures profit from theories of translating culture (e.g. cultural constellations, cf. Floros 2003) and can such theories contribute to systematizing such complex tasks as the translation of rap or comics?
- How can the transparency of the interplay of auditive and visual information in a concrete situation lead to modified coherence concepts for audiovisual translation?
- How can coherence be established in non-linear hypertext document translations? And can systematic coherence establishing strategies and condensation principles in turn lead to the development of new strategies in simultaneous interpretation?
- Can authentic complex dialog situations configuring intended thematic leaps & gaps or non sequitur phenomena of cross-purpose talks, parallel speech sequences, abrupt turns in conversation lead to new and finer types of information structuring categories?
- How can the problem of connotative and emotional transfer be tackled in subtitling for the hard-of-hearing, for language acquisition purposes or in sign language interpreting?<sup>8</sup>
- Can the iconicity of representing events in sign language interpreting lead to systematized syntax and information structuring designs for (sign) language interpretation and mediation?

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<sup>6</sup> cf. the recent works of Annelly Rothkegel (2003, 2004a and b)

<sup>7</sup> cf. Minako O'Hagan 2007

<sup>8</sup> cf. Neves 2005 and forthcoming.

## 4 Concluding Remarks

These are but few of the multitude of research questions that multidimensional translation research opens up in the future. In addition, many new horizons open up in hybrid translation forms such as the translation of music (Kunold forthcoming) or the transfer of visual information into tactile information (Wagner 2007)<sup>9</sup> or such complex transfer forms as theater translation (Griesel 2000, forthcoming), where a holistic approach is needed to integrate elements of respeaking and subtitling, simultaneous interpretation, and condensed translations.

Considering these manifold dimensions, the question of course arises as to the edges and limits of the multidimensional translation concept. Could the choreography of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, danced to elements of music by Bach and Wagner as John Neumeier produces it so beautifully on stage be researched in its complexity under the umbrella of multidimensional translation? Can the transfer of visual information to tactile information be researched for its invariant components on the basis of a wider translation concept and based on transparency-driven methodological standards? These questions certainly need further reflection and exploration and open up a completely new paradigm for a transfer science with powerful implications and a wide spectrum for further research opportunities for the next generation. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry put it so aptly: "To grasp the meaning of the world of today we use the language created to express the world of yesterday. The life of the past seems to us nearer to our true natures, but only for the reason that it is nearer to our language" (Motto of the Leopoldo Costa Prize award, SCIC Universities conferences, 2006).

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<sup>9</sup> Mathias Wagner received the VISU prize of Saarland University in 2004 for his research on this topic, cf. also Wagner 2007.

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