

## Extra material for chapter 4

### *Van Leuven-Zwart's comparative–descriptive model of translation shifts<sup>1</sup>*

The most detailed attempt to produce and apply a model of shift analysis has been carried out by Kitty van Leuven-Zwart of Amsterdam. Van Leuven-Zwart's model takes as its point of departure some of the categories proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet and Levý and applies them to the descriptive analysis of a translation, attempting both to systematize comparison and to build in a discourse framework above the sentence level. Originally published in Dutch in 1984 as a doctoral thesis it is more widely known in its abbreviated English version which consists of two articles in *Target* (van Leuven-Zwart 1989, 1990). The model is 'intended for the description of integral translations of fictional texts' (1989:154) and comprises (1) **a comparative model** and (2) **a descriptive model**. Like Popovič, van Leuven-Zwart considers that trends identified by these complementary models provide indications of the translational norms adopted by the translator. The characteristics of each model are as follows:

1 The **comparative model** (1989: 155–70) involves a detailed comparison of ST and TT and a classification of all the microstructural shifts (within sentences, clauses and phrases). Van Leuven-Zwart's method (1989: 155–7) is as follows:

- Van Leuven-Zwart first divides selected passages into 'comprehensible textual unit[s]' called 'transemes'; 'she sat up quickly' is classed as a transeme, as is its corresponding Spanish TT phrase 'se enderezó'.
- Next, she defines the 'Architranseme', which is the invariant core sense of the ST transeme. This serves as an interlingual comparison or *tertium comparationis* (see chapter 3). In the above example, the Architranseme is 'to sit up'.
- A comparison is then made of each separate transeme with the Architranseme and the relationship between the two transemes is established.

If both transemes have a synonymic relationship with the Architranseme, no shift is deemed to have occurred. The absence of a synonymic relationship indicates a shift in translation, and shifts are divided into three main categories with numerous subcategories. The three main categories are **modulation**, **modification** and **mutation**; these are explained in table 4.1. An illustrative example of the application of the analysis is the following quotation from a short story by Katherine Mansfield and its Spanish translation:

As to the boy – well, thank heaven, mother had taken him; he was mother's, or Beryl's, or anybody's who wanted him.

En cuanto al pequeño ... menos mal, por fortuna su madre se había encargado de él; era suyo, o de Beryll, o de cualquiera que lo quisiera.

(in van Leuven-Zwart 1990: 85)

**Table 4.1**

Main categories of van Leuven-Zwart's comparative model (from van Leuven-Zwart 1989)

<i>Category of shift</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Modulation (pp. 159–64)	One of the transemes tallies with the Architranseme, but the other differs either semantically or stylistically: the <i>sit up</i> example would be classed as modulation because the English phrase has an extra element ( <i>quickly</i> )
Modification (pp. 165–8)	Both transemes show some form of disjunction (semantically, stylistically, syntactically, pragmatically, or some combination of these) compared to the Architranseme; for example, <i>you had to cry</i> and <i>hacía llorar</i> ('it caused you to cry')
Mutation (pp. 168–9)	It is impossible to establish an Architranseme either because of addition, deletion or 'some radical change in meaning' in the TT

Focusing on the ST transeme *mother's* and the TT transeme *suyo* [lit. 'hers'], van Leuven-Zwart's identifies two microshifts:

- syntactic–semantic modification: the noun + Saxon genitive *mother's* becomes the possessive pronoun *suyo*;
- syntactic–pragmatic modification: the selection of *mother's* rather than *hers* meaning that more pragmatic information is supplied to the reader in the English ST than in the Spanish TT, where the reader has to understand the link to *madre*.

Once all the shifts are identified and categorized on this low 'microstructural' level, the number of occurrences in each category is totalled and their cumulative effect is then calculated by using a descriptive model, as follows:

2 The **descriptive model** (van Leuven-Zwart 1989: 171–9) is a macrostructural model, designed for the analysis of translated literature. It is based on concepts borrowed from narratology (Bal 1985) and stylistics (Leech and Short 1981). It attempts to interweave the concepts of 'discourse level' (the linguistic expression of the fictional world) and 'story level' (the narration of the text, including narratorial point of view) with three linguistic 'metafunctions' (interpersonal, ideational and textual<sup>2</sup>). Van Leuven-Zwart illustrates the perceived interaction of these elements by means of a complex chart (1990: 87) that matches specific micro- and macro-structural shifts to the three functions on the discourse and story levels. For instance, each case of syntactic–pragmatic modulation is said to affect the interpersonal function on the story level. Thus, in the *mother's/suyo* example above, the extra pragmatic information provided by *mother's* in the ST is not necessary; however, its presence emphasizes the relationship, which might serve to stress the mother's disinterest in looking after the baby (van Leuven-Zwart 1990: 85). This disappears in the TT, shifting the interpersonal nature of the narrative.

The analytical model involves totalling the number of instances of each kind of shift in five thousand word extracts and examining the patterns that emerge. The model has been applied by around seventy of van LeuvenZwart's postgraduate students to Dutch translations of mainly Spanish and Latin American literary texts. The results show a preponderance of semantic shifts, while specification and explanation are also frequent. Van LeuvenZwart (1990: 92–3) considers the translation strategy of the works that she analyzes to be TT-oriented, with a consequent emphasis on acceptability in the target culture. This extra step of relating the results to higher-

level discourse considerations and attempting to identify the norms in operation means that van Leuven-Zwart's model goes further than the mainly linguistic comparisons which characterize Vinay and Darbelnet's and Catford's work. This is an important development and ties in with Toury's work on norms and acceptability which is discussed in chapter 7.

There are, however, drawbacks to this model, and these drawbacks relate to taxonomies in general. First, as van Leuven-Zwart herself partly recognizes (1989: 153–4), the comparative model is extremely complex. There are practical implications in allocating the different kinds of shift since there are eight different categories and thirty-seven subcategories, not all clearly differentiated. Second, keeping track of all the shifts throughout a long text is also difficult. It may be that this second problem can be overcome to some extent by computer-assisted analysis of electronic texts. Third, the use of the Architranseme as an equivalence measure encounters the same kind of problem concerning its subjectivity as we saw with the *tertium comparationis* in chapter 3.

Finally, the statistical matching of category of shift with metafunction and story/discourse level does not appear to discriminate between the relative importance of different examples of each category. It exposes itself to some of the criticisms made about the 'number-crunching' applications of stylistics.<sup>3</sup> What needs to be developed is a detailed *critical* analysis of the effect of the microshifts on the realization of the communicative situation and the narrative structure.

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<sup>1</sup> In the first edition, this appeared as Section 4.4, within the chapter on translation shift analysis. Since the model is infrequently referred to in current translation studies, it has been omitted from the second edition.

<sup>2</sup> These functions originate in Bühler (1939/65) and are later developed by Halliday. See chapters 5 and 6 of the second edition for a more detailed explanation.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Fish (1981) or van Peer (1989).

## References

- Bühler, K. (1934/65) *Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache*. Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer.
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- Leuven-Zwart, K. M. van (1989) 'Translation and original: Similarities and dissimilarities, I', *Target* 1.2: 151–81.
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