

# Christiane nord's notion of 'function plus loyalty'



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The emergence of functionalist approaches to translation in the 1970s and 1980s was quite revolutionary in that it marked the move from what Munday (2001: 72) describes as 'the static linguistic typologies of translation shift', a term defined by Catford (1965: 73) as 'departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL', to a consideration of the overall function of the Target Text (TT) in the Target Culture (TC). However, these approaches have been criticised on various grounds. This paper investigates one of these criticisms and whether Chritiane Nord's notion of 'function plus loyalty' adequately addresses the issue.

## **SKOPOSTHEORIE**

As a term, functionalism is used to refer to the aggregate of approaches to translation that focus on the overall function(s) of a text or translation (Nord 1997: 1). In other words, functionalism has been expressed or practised differently by different scholars and translators. However, they all appear to have drawn inspiration from what Vermeer has called *skopostheorie*, the birth of which apparently marked the beginning of *functionalism* (Honig 1997: 6).

According to Vermeer (2004), '[t]he skopos of a translation is ... the goal or purpose, defined by the commission and if necessary adjusted by the translator' (236) and this notion of skopos can be applied in the translation process, the translation result as well as the translation mode (230). This skopos determines whether a text should be translated word for word or paraphrased or even adapted. As Nord (1997) puts it, the '*Skopos* of a

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particular translation task may require a " free" or a " faithful" translation, or anything between these two extremes, depending on the purpose for which the translation is needed' (29). Thus a single text can beget different translations according to the different translation briefs provided.

This approach was quite novel in that it, to a large extent, addressed the ' eternal dilemmas of free vs faithful translations, dynamic vs formal equivalence, good interpreters vs slavish translators, and so on' (Nord 1997: 29). However, it has also received quite a number of criticisms. One of such attacks came from Pym (1996) who questions the ability of functionalism to provide a basis for a professional ethics of translation. He then asks:

Can such a theory generate a way of discerning between good and bad purposes, between good and bad translation strategies? Or is its aim merely to produce mercenary experts, able to fight under the flag of any purpose able to pay them? (2)

Pym questions the apparent neglect of the ST, undue emphasis on the TT and the ' freedom' skopostheorie gives the translator to produce any kind of text as dictated by the translation brief, whether or not the said brief is a far cry from the intentions of the author of the source text. In response to such criticisms, Nord added the concept of ' loyalty' to functionalism.

## **FUNCTION PLUS LOYALTY**

Chritiane Nord maintains that the loyalty principle is meant to ' account for the culture-specificity of translation concepts, setting an ethical limitation to the otherwise unlimited range of possible *skopoi* for the translation of one particular source text' (2007: 2-3). Loyalty is used to refer to the

responsibility of translators, as mediators between two cultures, towards their partners namely, the source-text author, the client or commissioner of the translation, and the target-text receivers (Nord 2001: 185). It may also be seen as 'taking into account the intentions and expectations of *all* the partners in the communicative interaction named translation' (195). Though the client's brief determines the skopos of the translation, it is not the only determining factor for the translation. The translator should be loyal to the ST author by ensuring that he not produce a TT that falsifies the author's intentions (Nord 2005: 32). In other words, loyalty ensures some compatibility between the ST and the TT. The translator should also be loyal to the target audience, who have some expectations of what the translations should be like, by explaining in a footnote or preface how they arrived at a particular meaning, the thought-process involved.

Nord distinguishes loyalty from fidelity or equivalence. While she sees the former as an interpersonal relationship between the translator and his partners, the latter she sees as concepts used to refer to the linguistic or stylistic similarity between the source and the target texts, regardless of the communicative intentions involved' (2001: 185)

### **HOW ADEQUATE?**

This section looks at the adequacy of Nord's function plus loyalty principle to translation, especially in relation to Pym's accusation of skopostheorie producing only mercenary experts.

In the first place, it checks the apparent freedom of the translator to produce any kind of translation in accordance with the client's brief. While function

requires that the translation be modelled to fit into the brief provided by the commissioner, loyalty requires the translator to justify their choice of translation method by considering the interests of all the participants involved in the translation, not just that of the client. A translator should not produce a translation that goes contrary to the brief; they also should satisfy the expectations of the target audience as well as not falsify the intentions of the author. So if the brief betrays the communicative intentions of the author, it is then the translator's duty to draw the attention of the client to this apparent anomaly. Pym (2007: 132) quotes Nord as saying that ' If the client asks for a translation that would mean being disloyal to either the author or the target readership or both, the translator should argue this point with the client or perhaps even refuse to produce the translation on ethical grounds'. So the translator is not a mere mercenary since they do not accept whatever skopos is given them. Downie puts it this way: ' With the addition of the notion of " loyalty" the translator is now ethically and professionally responsible to either observe the expectations their partners have of their work or to tell them why these expectations have not been met' (2), This principle reduces the number of skopoi that could be generated for a single translation text.

Two questions may be raised against the loyalty principle, one of which has been partly answered in Downie's quote above namely: is it always possible for every party to be made happy by the translator? According to Nord, the translator has the moral obligation not to translate on a brief that will falsify the author's intention. If after explaining the situation to the client and the client insists on not modifying the brief to make up for the defect, the

translator has the moral responsibility to refuse to do the translation. Downie has already highlighted what the translator should do if the translation goes contrary to the expectations of the receiving audience. In Nord's words, ' if the target culture expects the translation to be a literal reproduction of the original, translators cannot simply translate in a non-literal way without telling the target audience what they have done and why' (1997: 125). This increases the level of confidence the audience has on the translator and makes them more ready to accept the translation as of a good quality even if their (the audience's) expectations are not met.

This raises the second question: will the adoption of the documentary translation in situations where the source culture is markedly different from the target culture, seen in the additional explanations the translator has to make for the reader, not affect the reception of the work since the audience is aware that the text is not the original, but a translation? Though the reader might be affected by the realisation, the style shows that the translator has some respect for the reader and will help build their confidence in the translator for taking the pains to explain their strategy and choices.

One other issue the loyalty principle addresses is the supposed ' dethronement' of the source text. This is also one of the bases for Pym accusation of translators as being mere mercenary experts since the ST may result in TTs with which it shares a very tenuous relationship. Loyalty insists that the communicative intentions of the author be reproduced in the TT. And this can only be achieved when a detailed analysis of the ST is done to appreciate its place in the source culture, temporally and spatially. Nord

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insists that the interpretation of a text goes beyond the linguistic, that it ' is a product of the many variables of the situation (time, place, addresses) in which it originated' (1997: 119), and that ' the analysis of extratextual factors such as author, time, place, or medium may shed some light on what may have been the sender's intentions' (125-6). The translator then does a similar extratextual study of the target situation to identify the expression that best reflects the author's intentions in the target situation. So in the main, the TT intentions are hinged on those of the ST.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is axiomatic that a text is open to multiple interpretations, and translations. But Nord's notion of function plus loyalty has indeed restricted the otherwise arbitrary production of translation briefs and translations that are a far cry from the message of the ST. It also weakens the criticism that functionalism advocates a ' dethronement' of the ST. However, the satisfaction of every party involved in the translation process is only but an ideal, not always practicable. But loyalty has made the translator more responsible and conscious of their translations and increased the confidence of other participants on the translator. Indeed if translators will adhere to this charge of being loyal, the problems of mistranslations will be greatly reduced.

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