The central role of relevance in translation - Communicative clues' (ppt)

(Ernst-August Gutt, guest lecture at GradUS Workshop, Universität des Saarlandes, Saarbrücken, 3.7.2009)

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Slide 1. (Title)

The general topic of this day is "Grundprinzipien des wissenschaftlichen Denkens u. Arbeitens". It may not be obvious how this lecture on the central role of relevance fits into that wider theme. Now the focus of my research for the last 20 years or so has been the application of RT (= relevance theory) to translation. One important contribution of RT is that it tries to understand all matters of human communication from the angle of how the human mind manages communicative tasks. This puts these studies on an empirical cause-effect foundation, the principal question being "What cognitive endowments cause communication effort X to lead to communication result Y?".

This cause-effect approach is quite different from the descriptive and classificatory approaches so widely used in translation studies, and it is my hope that this presentation will not only help to give a clearer picture of the role 'communicative clues' play in translation but that it will serve as an illustration or example of how this cause-effect based approach in general operates.

Since some of you may be quite familiar with relevance theory, but others may not, I'll try to steer some kind of middle course, trying to keep everybody on board. I will proceed as follows: … ►

Slide 2. (Outline)

After raising the problem, I will briefly introduce some fundamental notions that are relevant to our argument. After that we will turn to the specific concepts of communicative properties and then of communicative clues, with their special significance for translation.

I realise that this is a compromise solution and ask in advance for your forbearance if some of you find they are told things they already know and if others feel that not enough is explained. So let's begin with the … ►

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… problem. Translators often struggle with the question ► which features of the source text a translation should reflect. If they stay close to the source text, the translation may become awkward and be criticised as being too literal. If they move

away from the source, they run the risk of misrepresenting it and being too free. Here is an example.

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Charles Dicken's novel *Tale of two cities* begins as follows:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, ..."

► Kornei Chukovskii describes the literary quality of these words in the following terms:

"There is an almost poetic cadence in this excerpt. The sound symmetry conveys its ironic tone extremely well." (Chukovskii1984, p. 144)

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He then discusses a translation into Russian, whose English back translation is as follows:

"It was the best and worst of times, it was the age of wisdom and of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief and incredulity, it was the season of light and darkness, it was the spring of hope and winter of despair, ..."

(S.P. Bobrov and M.P. Bogolovskaja 1957 *Povest' o dvukh gorodakh,* Sobranie sochinenii, Moscow, vol. XXII, p. 6)

Chukovskii then gives the following evaluation: ►

""[The translators] did not catch the author's intonations and thus robbed his work of the dynamism stemming from the rhythm." (Chukovskii1984, p. 144)

Looked at in structural linguistic terms, the translators noted the redundancies and repetitions between these pairs of sentences and applied the rule of conjunction reduction – a perfectly normal process in English grammar. Thus in the … ►

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… first sentence, they noted the following ►

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… redundancies, and, by ► conjunction reduction, shortened it to the much more concise form ► "it was the best and worst of times", and they did this for ► …

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… all the sentence pairs in this paragraph. The question is: what is wrong with this adjustment? Was it really ► inappropriate, as Chukovskii claims? Is such judgement purely subjective, or can it be shown to have some ► more objective foundation? To answer these questions we will try to follow a cause-effect inquiry along relevance-theoretic lines.

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One of the key insights of relevance theory is that verbal communication is not primarily a matter of language, but of what has been called ► "mind-reading". Put another way, the central task in verbal communication is ►not the decoding of what has been expressed in an utterance, but to discover ►*what thoughts the communicator intended to share by it* – and those thoughts can be very different from what the utterance expressed.

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A husband and wife are planning to go to a concert at 7.30 in the evening. When ► at 6.45 p.m. the ► husband is still fully engrossed in his work and shows no signs of getting ready for the concert, the wife says to him, ► "It is a quarter to seven, darling." All the wife expresses in words is what the time is ("It is a quarter to seven, darling"), but what she intends him to understand is ► that he needs to stop working and to get ready for the concert now. This is a perfectly normal instance of everyday communication, and we are hardly ever aware that we mean things we don't say. The big question for the communication researcher, however, is to explain how this can possibly work: if people don't say what they mean – then how can we ever discover what they mean?

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The key to the secret is: our mind carries out a special ► comprehension procedure. This comprehension procedure is carried out ► automatically and subconsciously most of the time – ► we only tend to gain some awareness of it when problems arise.

So, when it works well, what does this procedure do?

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It is a basic characteristic of human beings not just to pick up information from their environment randomly and store it away, but try ► to „***make sense***" of it - to ***interpret*** it.

What does "making sense" consist of? It means ► integrating the new information in certain ways with information we already have, with our cognitive environment, as RT calls it. This integrative relationship is achieved by thinking, more spefically by **inference**. When we ► succeed in relating the information given to our previous knowledge, we experience it as ► **relevant**.

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What, then, makes for relevance? So far, three types of relations that make for relevance have been identified:

► contextual implications

► Strengthening of assumptions

► Erasure of assumptions (via contradiction)

Together, they are referred to as ► "cognitive effects".

NB: ► "assumptions" is the technical term for thoughts assumed to be true.

There is no time here to explain these effects in detail. Let me just give a brief illustration of the first of these effects, … ►

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… contextual implication.

A mother asks her teenage daughter …

► Mother: What's your new teacher like?
► Daughter: He rides to school on a motorbike.

In this brief exchange, the daughter's response does not answer her mother's question: the mother asked about the daughter's opinion of the new teacher; the

daughter talks about how he gets to school – something the mother did not ask about. Yet, they are not talking past each other.

Suppose the mother knows that the ► daughter finds men cool who ride motorbikes. In that case, it is quite clear that the daughter's answer to the question is a) ► that she does like the teacher and ► b) also the reason why because he rides a motorbike.

How can we explain that understanding? It is certainly not expressed in the linguistic forms.

As we said earlier, our mind tries to make sense of things, looking for relevance by trying to establish inferential links between different pieces of information.

Furthermore, utterances typically do not express all the information necessary for understanding their meaning.

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Presented more formally, in our example the following process of inference takes place.

What the daughter actually expressed was that the new teacher rides a motorbike to school. Let's take this to be ► premise 1.

The information that she likes men who ride motorbikes would then be ► premise 2.

Taken together, these two premises logically imply the ► conclusion, that

the daughter likes the new teacher.

So, it is this logical relatedness that makes us feel that the daughter's answer is relevant, "makes sense": it leads to a logical conclusion – or, in relevance-theoretic terminology, to a ► contextual implication, an implication which logically follows from ► the contents expressed (premise 1) and a ► contextual assumption, drawn from shared knowledge, from the mutual cognitive environment of mother and daughter.

What is important is that **all cognitive effects have in common that they are** experienced **by us as cognitively rewarding**: relevant information is ► cognitively beneficial. And it is the search for these cognitive **benefits** that makes our minds **work**. But **work is** the other side of the coin: nothing in life is for free – including cognitive effects! The mind does need to work - comprehension takes an … ►

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… effort. Here are some factors that increase the effort we experience:

► structural complexity of utterance

► accessibility of the information in our mind - sometimes it takes considerable effort to figure out which particular "John" an acquaintance is talking about.

► complexity of thought processes required (e.g. combination of complex concepts, as in scientific definitions) and

► other matters.

While at first sight we might regret this ►cost factor, it is actually crucial for the whole process of human communication to succeed! How does that work? According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), our mind utilizes these two factors in an … ►

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… optimisation process: on the one hand, it is looking for benefits - for cognitive effects - combining what is said with what it knows; on the other hand, it tries to avoid unnecessary processing effort, keeping it as low as possible.

Thus, our minds look for ► optimal relevance in the following sense:

► adequate cognitive effects

► without unnecessary processing effort.

This search for optimal relevance in communication provides the heuristic that makes comprehension work so well:

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Relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure

► Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects.

In particular, test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.

►Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied and assume that the interpretation arrived at is the intended one.

(Sperber and Wilson 2002, 'Pragmatics, modularity and mind-reading')

Note that this experience of … ►

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… satisfaction is important – not only in setting an endpoint to the comprehension process (one could go on forever getting information from memory and deriving cognitive effects), but because it **serves for the audience as the criterion that they have understood what the communicator intended.**

To see the vital importance of this experience of optimal relevance for successful communication, let us meet … ►

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… Mr. Veneranda. One day, Mr. Veneranda went into a decorator's shop, where the following conversation occurred:

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"How can I help?" the decorator asked Mr. Veneranda.
"I would like to have my dining room wallpapered, "Mr. Veneranda said, "the horse can't do it."
"Pardon?" the shop owner asked, thinking he had misheard something.
"I said, "Mr. Veneranda repeated, "that I want to have my dining room wallpapered."
"But you added, 'The horse can't do it'," the decorator stammered. "Perhaps I did not understand you correctly."
"You understood me perfectly well," Mr. Veneranda said. "Indeed, the horse can't do it. Do you think, a horse could wallpaper my dining room?"
"No, but …", not quite knowing what to say, the decorator fumbled for words.
"What do you mean - 'but'?" Mr. Veneranda asked. "If a horse could wallpaper my dining room, I would go to a horse. But since it can't do it, I have come to you, a decorator, whose job wallpapering is. Is it your view that I should get my dining room wallpapered by a horse?"
"But what has the horse got to do with it?" the decorator stuttered in confusion.
"Exactly my point," Mr. Veneranda said, "what has the horse got to do with it? Horses have got nothing whatsoever to do with wallpapering."
"Shall I then wallpaper your dining room?"

“That’s really up to you,” said Mr. Veneranda. “If you want to come and do it, please do come. If you want to send a horse, then just do that. However, you’ll be responsible. I want the job done well. Agreed?”

And saying goodbye, Mr. Veneranda left the shop owner in a rather confused state.

(Manzoni, C. (1955). Da stimmt was nicht. Kuriose Geschichten. Translated by R. Mayer-Rosa and J. Piron. München, Albert Langen u. Georg Müller, p. 63; translation from German my own, EAG).

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The relevance-theoretic explanation of this communication failure is that nothing can be seen to follow from Mr. Veneranda’s utterance “The horse can’t do it”. Though linguistically clear and though both communication partners agree that it is true, it does not lead to cognitive effects, and without confirmation through the experience of optimal relevance, the hearer has no assurance of having understood. Hence the decorator’s confusion about Mr. Veneranda’s meaning.

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For successful comprehension to occur, it is ►not enough that we understand the word or sentence uttered; we need to have some idea of ►why we are told this.

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As we saw earlier on, cognitive effects and hence relevance strongly depend on what information we already have, that is, on our cognitive environment. So, in the relevance-theoretic framework, verbal communication can be seen to work through the close interaction of three factors: ► the utterance, ► the cognitive environment, and ► the intended interpretation. As we shall see, these three factors are ► highly interdependent and the interaction between them is very dynamic.

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Let us now illustrate this more concretely with an ordinary act of communication.

The process starts with the ► **communicator**. He has just been to **London** ► and wants to tell his ► **friend** (audience) about it. The two know each other quite well, and the information shared between ► them is their **mutual cognitive environment**.

So, the communicator has some ► **thoughts** in his mind he wants his friend to recognise. However, since the friend cannot read his thoughts, the communicator has to come up with something perceptible, a **stimulus**, to give evidence of his thoughts. Let’s say in this case he writes him ► a **letter**. Now, as illustrated before, **the stimulus alone does not contain all the intended meaning**. **Other information** must be used to understand that meaning – and this other information is referred to in relevance theory as ► **context**. It is part of the mutual cognitive environment – the information shared between the two friends. So, the task of the ► **audience** is to figure out from the stimulus (text) and the ► context ► **together** (brace) what the intended meaning is – and the way this is done is by **thinking**, more specifically, by ► **inference**. The result of this inference process are ► **the thoughts which the audience** has understood the communicator wants him to have. **The more closely the thoughts understood by the audience ► resemble the thoughts the communicator actually intended to convey, the more successful the communication has been.**

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It is this interdependence and interactiveness that brings us to the main topic of this presentation: ‘communicative clues’. How do utterances, or texts, influence the interpretation process? They do so by the ► recognizable properties they have, for

example, their ► lexical contents and their ► grammatical structure. We will call such properties ► **communicative properties**. However, utterances have many properties that people can clearly perceive, but that play ► no role for the intended interpretation. Obvious properties in this category seem to be ► individual voice quality and ► speech impediments, like stuttering or lisping. These we will call ► **incidental properties**. A telltale sign of incidental properties seems to be that we omit them when reporting what someone said. For example, if a colleague had a stutter or lisp, we would not include those features, not even in verbatim quotes. In fact, if we did, it would change the nature of our communication quite drastically, often making it offensive. Yet consider the following little poem …►

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The thundergod went for a ride

upon his favourite filly.

“I’m Thor!” he cried.

The horse replied,

“You have forgotten your thaddle, thilly!”

(unknown author)

When citing this poem, the reproduction of the horse’s ► lisp features seems important: without them it is very difficult to understand the joke. Well, …►

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… these observations seem to undermine our attempt to divide the recognisable properties of utterances into the two neat categories of communicative versus incidental properties. So, ► what is going on here? What we have here is …►

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… precisely the outworking of the dynamic interdependence between utterance, cognitive environment and intended interpretation we just talk about. It is the search for relevance that drives the comprehension process, and … ►

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… in this poem, the observation that the horse has a ► lisp does lead to more cognitive effects; it makes accessible the idea that the horse mistook the name *Thor* for the adjective ► *sore*, and now the horse’s remark about the ► missing saddle makes ► sense in answer to the rider’s apparent ► complaint about soreness. It is this experience of relevance that confirms the interpretation, and thereby also confirms the status of these lisp features as communicative properties of this utterance.

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So, what we can learn from these considerations is that a) the distinction between communicative and incidental properties is a valid and important one; but that b) this distinction does not depend on their intrinsic nature and therefore is not static but ► depends on the role they are intended to play in a particular instance of communication and is therefore dynamic. With these thoughts in mind, let us return now to the passage from Dickens.

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We were considering a Russian translation that had applied the rule of conjunction reduction throughout this passage and we were asking the two questions: ► Was this adjustment inappropriate? Is there any objective basis for making that kind of

judgment? And now we want to ask more specifically: ► can perhaps a comparison of communicative properties provide such a basis? To find out, we need to examine the interpretation of each of the two texts.

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As we said, communication is driven by optimisation, that is, by the search for adequate benefits without unnecessary effort. This effort sensitivity seems to raise a problem with Dickens' original text: as we saw earlier, there appears to be … ►

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… much overlap and redundancy in these sentences, and that is, of course, why the translators applied ► conjunction reduction; it resulted in a much more concise and economic statement of the same propositional content. We could, of course, conclude that here ► Dickens failed to express himself in an optimally relevant way. While this is certainly a theoretical possibility, it does not seem terribly likely, given the well-known literary skills of the author. There is, however, an alternative explanation: that Dickens intended to communicate **more** than just the propositional content of these utterances, that he had a **richer interpretation** in mind, with **additional cognitive** effects that would outweigh the costs incurred by the linguistic redundancies. What could this interpretation be?

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As Chukovskii says, this passage has a strong flavour of **irony**. How does irony arise? According to relevance-theory, we perceive utterances as ironic when they ► **echo** what someone said or thought but do so with a clearly ► **negative or dissociative attitude**. That Dickens indeed intended to give a dissociative echo of what certain people said is corroborated by the closing part of this paragraph… ►

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… shown here in yellow:

"—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

What Dickens was getting at was the tendency of certain influential people – he calls them ► "authorities" – to evaluate their time in exaggerated terms, regardless of whether their evaluation was good or bad. Each of the opening sentence is a sample of these exaggerated opinions. Dickens' dissociative attitude shows through in a number of ways: first, presenting them in pairs of opposites strongly highlights their absurdity; also, Dickens calls these people ► 'noisy'. Looked at in this way, the grammatical choice of using complete sentences despite their semantic overlap turns out to be a **crucial communicative property** of this passage, reflecting the fact that these statements represent the opinions of different people. Now we can also see why the rendering in the Russian translation is quite disastrous: by conjoining the sentences the translators removed this communicative property of the text, ending up with a … ►

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… sequence of self-contradictory statements, whose intended meaning is ► difficult to see.

Slide 38. (Taking stock)

This seems to be a good point to pause and take stock. We started looking for some objective help with the ► question which features of the source text a good translation should reflect. As a case in point we took the Russian translation of a

passage from Dickens' ► *Tale of two cities* that has been criticised for losing the ironic tone of the source text.

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The relevance-theoretic framework drew our attention to the close interdependence of utterance, interpretation, and cognitive environment, moving us beyond looking for direct relations between textual features and intended interpretation. This allowed us to see that the …►

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… **ironic** flavour of the passage arose from a ► dissociative attitude to echoed opinions, not from "sound symmetry", as had been suggested by Chukovskii (1984:44).

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This analysis then revealed that the use of separate, unconjoined sentences is vital for recognising the ► different opinions echoed, therefore is a ► communicative property of this passage, and therefore needs to be ► reflected in the translation. The relevance theoretic framework also brought out the important role of ► …

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…processing effort, a factor almost completely overlooked in most theories of meaning and communication. This sensitivity to processing effort explained why the translators felt the need to conjoin the utterances – it eliminated seemingly unnecessary processing effort. What the translators did not recognise is that the additional processing effort was not unnecessary at all but lead to a richer, ironic interpretation whose additional cognitive effects would outweigh the additional effort.

It seems worth pointing out here that, in fact, ► seemingly unnecessary processing effort quite often can be a telltale sign of missed communicative properties – and hence of missed intended meaning. Of course, authors can slip up and be, for example, unnecessarily redundant. However, before settling for this verdict translators will do well to check whether they might have missed communicative properties. They should be particularly careful when dealing with texts by highly skilled authors like Charles Dickens. On a more general level, this framework underlines ► …

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… the often-made claim that it is necessary for translators to understand the text before they can adequately translated: ► **the communicative properties of a text cannot be determined apart from its intended interpretation**. The two have to be looked at in ► tandem, as it were.

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Of course, translators typically have to deal not just with one language, but with two and ► what makes two languages different from each other are their concrete properties; if their properties were the same – in phonology, grammar and lexicon – they would not be different languages. So, understanding better what the communicative properties of the source text are does not necessarily solve a translator's problems, especially if the receptor language is different with regard to relevant communicative properties. Here is an example. It is quite a different text from the Dickens passage; it is an …►

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… advertisement of Greenpeace that appeared in a German newspaper. (Pause) Here is a ► literal gloss of the main text: ► "the earth is a disk … ► and

environment-protection is superfluous". Perhaps to some of us the intended meaning of this advertisement may be somewhat obscure. How about with the following translation?

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"► The earth is flat and protection of the environment is unnecessary." I assume that with this rendering the intended meaning of the advertisement is much clearer. How would we characterise it?

(Irony, making fun of the idea that protection of the environment is unnecessary)

What we want to examine now is what makes this second rendering so much clearer than the first one, and we want to focus on the ► first part of the main text: "The earth is flat". Just looking at the words, the difference is, of course, that the German noun *Scheibe* has been rendered by the adjective *flat* instead of the English noun *disk*. The question is, why is this a better choice here – after all, in strict linguistic terms *disk* is much closer to *Scheibe* than the adjective *flat*? Indeed, semantically *flat* means something quite different from *Scheibe*. Here again it is important to remember that we need to look not just at the text, but …►

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… at the interpretation process as a whole – at the dynamic interaction between text, cognitive environment and intended interpretation, linked together by the comprehension procedure.

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We said that the advertisement is somehow ironic and we learnt earlier that irony arises when the communicator presents someone's thought or opinion and dissociates him- or herself from it. The thought in question is here, of course, the ► ancient idea that our earth is flat rather than a globe. How do we know that the authors of the advertisement dissociated themselves from this belief? One obvious clue is, of course, the ► photo from space shown in the background that clearly shows the spheric nature of the earth. More importantly, though, the advertisers strongly rely on the ► attitudes with which contemporary society looks upon that kind of of world view: that it was ► naïve, that it is ► outdated now, that anybody asserting this kind of belief today would be considered ► ridiculous, and would not be taken seriously. All of this information is assumed to be ► part of the readers' cognitive environment.

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Now what is the relevance of drawing people's attention to this outdated belief? The point lies, of course, in the ► association of this first statement with the second one: "protection of the environment is unnecessary." The advertisers underline and strengthen this association by the deliberate use of the conjunction ► *und*, encouraging readers to treat these two ideas together. Put more specifically, the advertisers strongly encourage their readers to draw the following contextual implications: ► "claiming today that the environment doesn't need to be protected is as false, outdated, ridiculous and so forth as claiming that the earth is flat." These implications are, of course, ► cognitive effects and these make that outdated statement ► relevant.

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What is crucial for this ironic interpretation to work, is precisely that the first statement brings up in people's minds that old-fashioned world view of a flat earth and the attitudes that go with it. Now in German culture, this world view is closely linked to

the notion of a round disk, as encoded by the word ► *Scheibe* (at least in one of its senses).

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English does, of course, also have a word for this notion – precisely the word *disk* we just used. The reason, however, why the word does *disk* not work very well for this advertisement is that in contemporary English the most prominent sense of this word relates to ► digital media. This sense, however, is not linked to the flat earth view and the attitudes accompanying it today. It therefore does not guide the readers to the intended implications, in fact, it does not yield any obvious implications.

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In English it is rather the word ► *flat* that is strongly linked to that ancient world view, and makes highly accessible the thoughts and attitudes relating to it - especially when used together with the word ► "earth"; (In fact, the expression "flat earth" is commonly used for that world view – even Wikipedia has an entry under "flat earth"; cf. also "Flat earth society".) Though the use of the word ► *disk* may well lead to the intended interpretation after ► further reflection, this would require more mental ► processing effort, and it is the sensitivity to processing effort that makes the use of the word *flat* noticeably ► better, although linguistically it is quite different.

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What we see in this example then, is that although the translated text does ► differ from the source text in an important communicative property, it still is ► appropriate, in contrast to the first example. So, if we had concluded from the Dickens example that translators must **preserve** the communicative properties of the source text, that would have been a rash and false conclusion. Happily, we only said that it must "**reflect**" them! The question now is*:* ► …

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… why is it okay here that the translated text differs in communicative properties? Looking back at our analysis, the reason is not difficult to see; the criterion we applied for judging the appropriateness of this translation was whether it would ► *lead to the same interpretation as the source text*. So, in effect, what we did was abstract away from an actual, concrete property of an utterances to the ► **influence** which it has on the interpretation process, the **clue** this property provides towards the intended interpretation. This is the notion of ► **'communicative clue'**.

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Using this terminology, we can now say that the reason it is appropriate to translate the German noun *Scheibe* by the English adjective *flat* is that *flat* provides the ► same 'communicative clue' as *Scheibe* - in this particular example.

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What is the usefulness of this notion for translators? One advantage that came out in this Greenpeace example is that it can help the translator to sort out more explicitly ► *conflicting intuitions about sameness of meaning*. Thus, although much closer in semantic meaning, the English word *disk* did not seem to lead to the right text meaning. Relevance theory helped us to look beyond the words at the interpretation process as a whole in more detail, enabling as to see that despite its lexical differences the word *flat* provided the same clues for the intended interpretation as *Scheibe*.

More generally, the notion of communicative clue can be very helpful to translators ► when the source text has a communicative property that just does not exist in the target language. In such cases, translators may discover solutions by ► *abstracting*

away from the concrete communicative property to the communicative clue it provides. They may then find that the target language, after all, does have ways of providing the same communicative clue, though perhaps through a very different property or even combination of properties of the target language. Thus, this analysis may help them to find a ► good solution after all.

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Many Ethiopian languages, for example, lack the property of marking focal scales by stress assignment – which is a common device in European languages such as ► English: ►

The DEALER stole the money

► The dealer STOLE the money

The relevance-theoretic analysis of focal stress is that it gives rise to a focal scale; the focally stressed item points to the relevance-providing information in the sentence – the remainder are background assumptions along the focal scale. Thus the first utterance indicates that the idea ► that someone stole the money is a background assumption – that is, is assumed to be already contextually available - and that the relevance of the utterance lies in supplying the information who did this – ► the dealer.

In the second utterance, it is contextually assumed that ► the dealer did something to the money – and ► the relevance-bearing part is that he stole it.

With the communicative propoerty of focal stress not being available in some Ethiopian languages – how can one translate in such a way that the same kind of interpretation arises?

Taking ► Amharic, an Ethio-Semitic language, as an example, it can be shown that clefting has essentially the same effect on the interpretation process as focal stress in English – that it provides virtually the same communicative clue: ►

gänzäbun yäsärräqäw näggadew näw.

the-money he-who-stole the-dealer it-is

If we consider the real-time processing of this utterance, what is presented ► first is information about the stealing of money – so this naturally serves as background or contextual information for the last part of the sentence - which then supplies the relevance-bearing information: that it is the ► dealer who did this.

Similarly for the ► second sentence.

(For more detail ► see the discussion of a similar example in Gutt 2000:134-5 and Sperber and Wilson's account of focal stress in 1995:208ff).

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One other useful application of the concept 'communicative clue' is that it can be used as a ► complementary strategy for translation checking. The primary check lies, of course, in assessing the resemblance between the intended interpretation of the source text and of its translation. However, given the richness and open-endedness of intended interpretations, this is not an easy task, especially since it is highly dependent on intuition. While the deliberate checking for and comparison of communicative clues can probably never replace such intuitive evaluation, it can sometimes reveal gaps. There are, however, a number of important ► …

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… **caveats** that need to be added here. Perhaps most important is, firstly, that the notion of communicative clue is ► **not some kind of panacea** that will solve all the

translator's problems. While abstraction from the level of communicative property to the level of communicative clue may lead to a solution in some cases, there is **no** guarantee that it will do so in **all** cases. Whether it does or not will very much depend on the linguistic inventories of the languages concerned.

Secondly, the notion of communicative clue ► **does not address or resolve differences in cognitive environment between source and receptor audience**. In fact, the value of matching communicative clues in translation presupposes that the necessary contextual information **is** available in the cognitive environment of the target audience. Taking the Greenpeace example, no linguistic measure could provide the same communicative clue for a target audience who knew nothing of the flat earth view. Differences in the availability of necessary contextual information require **special strategies of adjusting the receptors' cognitive environment**.

Thirdly, looking for communicative properties and clues presents special challenges in that it ► **may require re-analysis of familiar linguistic features**. The reason is that much of present-day linguistic analysis has not taken into account that meaning arises from the systematic and dynamic interaction with people's cognitive environment. It has tended to attribute many aspects of meaning to language itself that actually arise from the interaction of linguistic features with contextual information. This tendency has resulted, for example, in what now looks like overinflated theories of lexical meaning. The recently started endeavour of lexical pragmatics is working on redressing this situation, resulting in much 'leaner' accounts of lexical meaning. While some encouraging progress has been made in such re-analyses, this enterprise is still very much at its beginning. For translators this means that in many cases they cannot just refer to ready-made analyses but may have to do some of the analytic groundwork themselves. This has certainly been my experience, but I find that it has its own rewards.

The last caveat I want to mention is that the notions of 'communicative property' and 'communicative clue' do ► not have a theoretical status of their own but are purely derivative. As said earlier, communicative properties and clues are not inherent in utterances, but arise from the interaction with particular cognitive environments in particular acts of communication. There is therefore little point, for example, in drawing up lists of communicative properties and clues and sort them into categories. As we tried to illustrate from the examples earlier on, in principle any recognisable property of an utterance can be used for communicative purposes, that is, can be used as a communicative property, providing a communicative clue. Despite their lack of independent theoretical status, these notions do seem to have some practical value, as I have tried to show.

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To conclude: we started with the challenge of looking for some objective way of determining the appropriateness of some of the more elusive features of texts, like irony. By looking at the complex interaction between text, cognitive environment, and intended interpretation, we first of all found that not all properties of an utterance are equally important for the interpretation it is intended to convey. We therefore distinguished between the communicative and incidental properties of utterances. It then seemed, that for a more objective evaluation of translations one could check whether it reflected the communicative properties of the source text. We then realised that because of language differences such a direct comparison of communicative properties is not adequate. This led us to the more abstract notion of 'communicative clue'. The main usefulness of these notions is heuristic and practical: they enable translators to understand and trace more explicitly the complex relations between text properties and intended interpretation. It is mainly this explicitness that leads to an increase in objectivity. However, we also tried to make clear that these

notions can only be supplementary to the intuitions of the human mind. Throughout our investigation … ►

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… the focus was on the cognitive processes by which communication takes place, trying to understand how different interpretations result from different input.

► Thank you.

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Appendix

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An act of translation can now be seen to involve the following interpretive activities. The starting point is the ► original stimulus, produced by the ► original communicator in ► language A, with the intention of sharing his/her ► intended interpretation. This requires the use of certain ► contextual information, assumed to be readily available in the ► mutual cognitive environment of the original communication.

The ► translator attempts to ► discover the intended meaning of the original communicator by ► inferentially combining the stimulus with ► a body of contextual information which he/she assumes to be very close to that intended by the original communicator. Of course, in doing so, the translator is influenced by his/her ► own cognitive environment, which ► may or may not overlap very much with that of the original.

The translator then needs to consider the ► receptor audience and their ► cognitive environment, — which actually ► may or may not overlap very much with his own — in order to assess the communicability of the meaning of the original to them, as well as their expectations about resemblance.

On the basis of this assessment the translator will decide ► what s/he will attempt to communicate to the target audience and will attempt to construct a ► stimulus in language B, from which the target audience will have to ► infer the ► meaning of the translation, using ► contextual information available in their own cognitive environment.

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Seeing the complexities of the interpretive processes involved in translation, one can see that it can go wrong at many points:

The translator may get the ► contextual assumptions for the original wrong – which would probably ► distort his/her understanding of its meaning, and then also keep

the ► receptors from using the right contextual information for recovering the intended interpretation of the translation. ► Knock-on effects would very likely impair ► the receptors' understanding.

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But, things could go wrong at various other points, for example when the translator misjudges the expectations of the audience and tries to communicate to them ►

inappropriate aspects of the original meaning. Again, by ► knock-on effects there could be ► miscomprehension with the receptors.

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Of course, it is also possible that the translator ► understands the originally well, judges the audience's cognitive environment correctly with regard to ► what aspects of the original interpretation they are interested in and ► the contextual information they have available – but then simply ► fails in finding the right expressions in the receptor language. Again, this could ► lead the receptors to misunderstand. (This is probably the most commonly addressed area in translation training.) Having talked at some length about potential failures of translation, let us close of this survey by asking the more positive and most important question: "When is translation successful?"

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One might be tempted to say that it is successful when the ► interpretation derived by the receptors resembles the ► originally intended interpretation ► as closely as possible. While this may be true in many cases, as a general rule it is ► too strong. It happens quite often, that the audience actually prefers a lower degree of resemblance – esp. if it saves them effort in understanding. Hönig and Kußmaul give as an example that the translator may be asked to 'translate' a paper, omitting the embellishments of the original and concentrating on what the paper said about a new production process (1984:27).

Hence in more general terms, one could say a translation is successful ► when the interpretation arrived at by the receptors resembles the original interpretation ► **in the expected ways** – which obviously requires that the translator has a clear idea of the audience's expectations.

——————— End of appendix ———————