

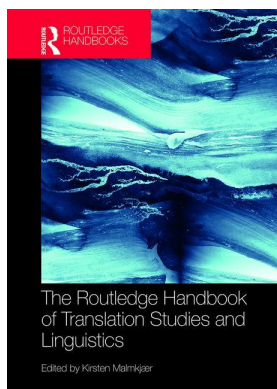
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 31 May 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies and Linguistics

Kirsten Malmkjær

Semiotics and translation

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315692845-4>

Henrik Gottlieb

Published online on: 18 Dec 2017

How to cite :- Henrik Gottlieb. 18 Dec 2017, *Semiotics and translation from: The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies and Linguistics* Routledge

Accessed on: 31 May 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315692845-4>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Semiotics and translation

Henrik Gottlieb

Translation: More than just words

In the novel *Il nome della rosa*, written by the semiotician Umberto Eco in 1980 (English translation by William Weaver, *The Name of the Rose* published in 1983), the protagonist, Brother William of Baskerville, tells his young novice: “I have never doubted the truth of signs, Adso; they are the only things man has with which to orient himself in the world. What I did not understand was the relation among signs” (Eco 1983, 527). [“*Non ho mai dubitato della verità dei segni, Adso, sono la sola cosa di cui l’uomo dispone per orientarsi nel mondo. Ciò che io non ho capito è stata la relazione tra i segni*” (Eco 1980, 321).]

In this chapter (based on Gottlieb 2003, 2005, 2008) I will focus on one key aspect of that “relation among signs” – namely the semiotic nature of translation. Traditional conceptions of translation have only included *intrasemiotic* translation (translation within a given sign system), and almost exclusively its subcategory *interlingual* translation, i.e. the transfer of verbal messages from one speech community to another. However, any kind of translation – even interlingual types – is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and the word “translation” covers at least two dimensions in which the given message is expressed: (1) time, i.e. the temporal progression of the translational *process*; and (2) space, including the semiotic composition of the translational *product*.

The central role of interlingual translation, the phenomenon that most people will associate with the term *translation*, has been succinctly described by Vassallo (2015, 171): “This post-Babelian phenomenon is a constant and inevitable aspect of our lives, anchored as they are in the interpretation and communication of linguistic and non-linguistic signs which surround us”.

Indeed, surrounded by an ever-increasing communicational output – from written online information to live multi-media presentations – we experience a growing need for translation. Mass-media products as well as acts of communication with more limited audiences are being translated – by professionals, by fan communities, by machines and by ourselves – in unprecedented numbers. Little wonder that recent decades have witnessed a growing scholarly interest in all the ramifications of translation.

New media require new methods of translation, and audiovisual media, in particular, represent challenges to the translator not known before the invention of sound film in 1927. Nevertheless, whether we work as literary or drama translators, interpret at conferences, localise computer software or subtitle TV series, what we translate is words – speech acts, to be exact (see Chapter 2, in this volume).

As stated above, a primary aim of this chapter is to expand the notion of translation in order to accommodate not only the nonverbal channels present in much modern communication, but also the types of communication not involving language in a traditional sense. Getting to grips with the nature of translation and the multitude of new texts representing – or *re-presenting* – existing texts also implies dealing with the myriad types of “multi-channel” texts so typical of contemporary society. While most of what was written on translation in the first decades after the breakthrough of Translation Studies in the 1970s dealt with written (interlingual) translation, since around 2000, audiovisual and nonverbal aspects of translation have enjoyed growing scholarly attention. Among the first titles dealing with “paraverbal” translation are Poyatos (1997) and Gambier and Gottlieb (2001). More recent titles on semiotic aspects of translation include Kourdis and Kukkonen (2015), and others that are listed in Gottlieb (2013). Finally, the issue of multimodality has been dealt with in Baldry and Thibault (2006) and in Kress (2010).

Taking as my point of departure the complex (*polysemiotic*) textual nature of communication, in which several semiotic channels are used simultaneously, in this chapter I intend to provide conceptual tools for dealing systematically with any type of translation encountered in today’s communicative landscape, by establishing a semiotically based taxonomy of translation. This semiotic mapping of the landscape of translation is based on an analysis of which channels constitute originals and translations, and – as we will see – not all translated texts use the same communicative channels as their originals.

The semantics of semiotics

The link between translation and semiotics has been forcefully expressed by Bassnett: “The first step towards an examination of the processes of translation must be to accept that although translation has a central core of linguistic activity, it belongs most properly to semiotics” (Bassnett 2014, 24).

The word “semiotics” shares the root “*sema*” (Greek for “sign”) with the term “semantics”, which is the scholarly discipline concerned with meaning, and semiotics can be defined as the discipline that deals with the communication of meaning through systems of signs. One such sign system is vocal language (e.g. Afrikaans) based on speech, another is signing (or sign language, e.g. British Sign Language) based on gestures – the type of non-vocal language used by the Deaf. As stated above, translation within one sign system is intrasemiotic, while translation between sign systems is intersemiotic. By “sign system”, I mean a disparate rule-based organisation of meaningful signs unlike any other such entity. This implies that I consider all so-called natural languages, e.g. Finnish, Xhosa and Japanese, representatives of one common system: that of vocal languages.

However, some semioticians consider individual languages disparate semiotic systems: “From the perspective of semiotics, translation is studied as a purely semiotic act that involves the transition from one semiotic system (source language) to another (target language)” (Kourdis 2015, 303). Even translation scholars like Gideon Toury tend to see languages as different systems (Toury 1986). I believe this is an unfortunate view, as all vocal languages use the same oral (and often written) semiotic channels. Only communication between a

(deaf) sign language user and a (hearing) user of a vocal language – no matter which – represents two semiotic systems, and for that reason deserves to be labelled “intersemiotic translation”.

The terms “semiotics” and “semiotic” have been used widely, and in widely different ways and contexts, even within Translation Studies.

Some scholars maintain that of the two traditional approaches within semiotics, the “structural” school initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure and the “interpretive” school based on Charles Peirce’s work, the latter is better suited to describing translational phenomena (Stecconi 2010, 314). The reason for this is that while the structuralists operate with a simple signifier–signified match, interpretive semiotics enters a human agent in this equation, thus yielding a triangular relationship between sign, object and interpretant – the latter concept referring to the effect on the interpreter (*ibid.*).

The process of translation involves a chain of disparate and consecutive acts, ranging from the conceiver(s) of the original text, via the text itself to the receiver(s) of the translated version. Even the translational product is a complex notion. As a synthesis of signs, the translated text encompasses much more than the rephrasing of the original message – a multifarious entity in its own right. Interpretation is key, and as phrased by Torop, “no translation is fundamentally a unique text but one of many possibilities to render the original text” (Torop 2008, 255).

As mentioned above, the starting point of 20th-century Translation Studies was to deal with texts that were seen as verbal only, whether written or spoken. Although all human experience is polysensorial, i.e. based on the combined input from all our five senses, for centuries we have communicated through, and translated, monosemiotic texts. These texts operate through one semiotic channel only, typically the written word, but they are not merely abstract verbalisations of a message just waiting for someone to read them, hear them or translate them.

As Zabalbeascoa, having studied film translation, aptly puts it, “no text can be made entirely of verbal signs because such signs always need some sort of physical support” (Zabalbeascoa 1997, 338). This physical support – represented by typographical conventions regarding layout and typefaces, etc. – gains semantic momentum in genuinely polysemiotic texts. The most prominent polysemiotic text type is the audiovisual text, defined by Chaume as “a semiotic construct comprising several signifying codes that operate simultaneously in the production of meaning” (Chaume 2004, 16). Polysemiotic texts are not always found in the media; a classical example of a polysemiotic text is the “artefact plus wall-panel explanation” text found in museums (Neather 2012), often expanded by means of a leaflet or audio description.

Stecconi states that “semiotics can be described as the discipline that studies how people make sense of their experience of the world and how cultures develop and give currency to this understanding” and that “semiotics is ultimately a theory of how we produce, interpret and negotiate meaning through signs” (Stecconi 2010, 314). As especially the former aspect, that of the production of signs, needs to be developed in order to understand the scope and impact of translation(s), this aspect will be the focus of this chapter.

In the following section we will look at the parameters that constitute texts (in a wide sense of that word) as well as those that shape the profile of the products of translations. Of special interest here are the possible differences in semiotic composition between source and target texts, and the effect of nonverbal factors on the verbal rephrasing of polysemiotic texts, e.g. films and TV productions.

Translation in the web of semiotics: Distinctions and definitions

As semiotics is intertwined with semantics – signs, by definition, make sense – any channel of expression in any act of communication carries meaning. For this reason, even exclusively nonverbal communication deserves the label “text”, thus accommodating phenomena such as music and graphics, as well as sign language (for the Deaf) and tactile messages in Braille (for the blind). In a Translation Studies context, the two latter categories represent strictly convention-based communication. This means that there is a (more or less) fixed relationship between the way a message is expressed in the two types of texts, ranging from an absolute 1:1 relationship – as found between Morse code and the Latin alphabet – to the degrees of freedom open to the translator of an advertising slogan from English into Spanish, for instance. Returning to sign language and Braille, these types of communication may very well be considered along with verbal-only (monosemiotic) and multi-channel (polysemiotic) texts. As opposed to what is true of music and graphics, relatively simple algorithms exist that would transform messages in Braille or in one of the world’s many sign languages into a vocal language – either written or spoken. As a case in point, the intersemiotic process of translating from the tactile to the visual mode – e.g. when a text in Braille is translated into “the same” text using alphanumeric characters – is certainly simpler and more rule-governed than the process of translating a printed text from one verbal language into another. Both communicative acts, however, deserve the label “conventional translation”, as opposed to, say, the less constrained communicative act performed by a radio reporter commentating on a baseball match for his listeners, i.e. the act of describing physical action through words (in any language). Such an act will be labelled “adaptational translation”.

Table 3.1 Intersemiotic types of translation

<i>Target text compared with original</i>		<i>Target text semiotics</i>		
		<i>Diasemiotic (different channel(s) than in the original)</i>	<i>Ultrasemiotic (more channels than in the original)</i>	<i>Infrasemiotic (fewer channels than in the original)</i>
Adaptational translation	Nonverbal	1. Music based on photo	2. Animation film based on music	3. Sketch of bee dance in encyclopedia
	Deverbalised	4. Manual illustrated for illiterates	5. Screen adaptation of novel	6. Painting based on drama
	Verbalised	7. Ball game on radio	8. Ball game on TV	9. Audio-described film on DVD
Conventional translation	Nonverbal	10. Written music	11. Statistical pie charts	12. Notation of ballet
	Deverbalised	13. Pictograms	14. Acted stage directions	15. International traffic sign
	Verbalised	16. Morse code decryption	17. Interpreted sign language user	18. Charts mediated to the blind

Table 3.2 Intrasemiotic types of translation

<i>Target text semiotics</i>	
<i>Target text compared with original</i>	<i>Isosemiotic (same channel(s) as original)</i>
Adaptational translation	19. New musical arrangement of standard tune
Nonverbal Verbal Interlingual	20. Remake of foreign film
Verbal Intralingual	21. Contemporary adaptation of “classic” film
Conventional translation	22. Transposition of music; interpreting between two sign languages
Nonverbal Verbal	Synchronic translation
	Diachronic translation
	Interlingual
	Dialectal translation
	23. Manually translated for foreign customers
	Diaphasic translation
	24. <i>Hamlet</i> into modern Danish
	Transliteration
	25. US hip-hop lyrics into standard Dutch
	Diametric
	26. Novel translated for children
27. Chinese poem into English	28. Subtitled foreign film
Intralingual	29. Abridged version of manual
	30. Dante into modern Italian
	31. <i>Verlan</i> into standard French
	32. Legal text made popular
	33. Arabic text rendered in Latin letters
	34. Subtitles for the Deaf

Since not all languages are verbal, we may define language as *any communicative system working through the combination of sensory signs*. This implies that, in turn, text may be defined as *any combination of sensory signs carrying communicative intention*.

Based on this communicative definition of text, an equally broad definition of translation may be ventured, namely: *any process, or product hereof, in which a text is replaced by another text reflecting, or inspired by, the original entity*. As pointed out by Steconi (2009, 263), “it is logically impossible to label as translation a text that is not perceived as speaking on behalf of another – i.e. that does not mediate between source and target environments”.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the colossal range of translational phenomena encompassed by this multidimensional definition. Below, the various dimensions and the resulting semiotic categorisation of translational phenomena will be discussed in detail.

Types of translation

All translations – and, indeed, all texts – have an intended audience, whether well defined or not. For this reason, the typological classification presented in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 is functional by nature, based on audience perception, i.e. on how each type of translation is cognitively processed by the intended audience.

The taxonomy represented in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 is based on four translational dimensions:

- I semiotic identity or non-identity between source and target texts, distinguishing intra-semiotic types of translation from intersemiotic types
- II possible changes in semiotic composition of the translation, which may be (a) isosemiotic (using the same channel(s) of expression as the source text), (b) diasemiotic (using different channels), (c) ultrasemiotic (using more channels) or (d) infrasemiotic (using fewer channels than the original text)
- III varying degrees of freedom for the translator, distinguishing adaptational (free) from conventional (bound) types of translation
- IV the presence or absence of verbal material in source and/or target texts, creating a distinction between translations that (a) remain verbal, (b) introduce nonverbal elements, (c) introduce verbal elements or (d) remain nonverbal.

In Tables 3.1 and 3.2, an example is given for each translation type of the taxonomy. Each of the 34 types will be discussed, and the examples will be explained.

Before discussing the vast array of translational types, the four central distinctions listed above will have to be defined:

I Intersemiotic vs. intrasemiotic translation

- (a) In intersemiotic translation, the channel(s) of communication used in the translated text will differ from the channel(s) used in the original text. In other words, the source and target texts are semiotically non-equivalent, yet – as phrased by Dusi (2015, 184) – the target text is “intersubjectively recognized as being linked” to a given source text. This link between source and target text embodies similarity rather than sameness or equivalence – the latter concept not even universally acknowledged by scholars studying monosemiotic translation.

- (b) In intrasemiotic translation, the sign systems used in source and target texts are identical; a case of semiotic equivalence. Whereas intersemiotic translation is a notion directly borrowed from Jakobson (1959), the term “intrasemiotic translation” – also used by Toury (1986) – encompasses Jakobson’s interlingual and intralingual types of translation. Within intrasemiotic translation, I distinguish between six different sub-categories of verbal conventional translation, whether interlingual (involving two languages) or intralingual (involving only one):
- (i) synchronic translation (with original and translation as contemporaries),
 - (ii) diachronic translation (between texts belonging to different ages),
 - (iii) dialectal translation (between different geographical, social or generational language variants),
 - (iv) diaphasic translation (making expert texts accessible to the public, adult fiction suited for children, etc.),
 - (v) transliteration (which involves a change in alphabet), and
 - (vi) diamesic translation (involving a change in language mode; i.e. from speech to writing or vice versa).

II Isosemiotic vs. diasemiotic, ultrasemiotic and infrasemiotic translation

- (a) The prototypical translation, sometimes termed “translation proper”, is isosemiotic: it uses the same communicative channel(s) as the original. In addition, it is also isomesic, i.e. it retains the language mode (oral or written) of the original. All sorts of printed translations are isomesic. Isomesic translation encompasses both monosemiotic texts (e.g. oral discourse being interpreted for foreign-language speakers) and polysemiotic texts (e.g. film dubbing, in which spoken source-language lines are replaced by lines spoken in the target language).
- (b) Diasemiotic translation uses different channels than the original text, while the number of channels (one or more) is the same. While the transfer from written into played music is an example of diasemiotic translation of a monosemiotic text, turning a silent movie into a radio play would constitute a polysemiotic example of diasemiotic translation: from verbal and nonverbal images to verbal and nonverbal sounds.
- (c) In ultrasemiotic translation, the translated texts display more semiotic channels than the original – as when a novel is semiotically unfolded into a film.
- (d) Lastly, the term infrasemiotic translation implies that the semiotic “bandwidth” (range of activated semiotic channels) of the translation is narrower than that of the original. We see this when, for instance, a mime artist performs a piece of drama originally including spoken lines; audio-described stage plays for the blind, for instance, fall into this category as well.

III Conventional vs. adaptational translation

As opposed to *en bloc* labelling of intersemiotic translation as adaptation – as does Eco (2004, 158–159) – I believe it necessary to distinguish between adaptational and conventional intersemiotic translation. The defining feature here is the degrees of freedom available to the translator. In other words, processes that follow conventional procedures, e.g. for transforming written music (i.e. notes) into performed music, are termed “conventional translations”, while processes in which the translator is not bound by existing “conversion tables” are named “adaptational

translations”. An oft-mentioned example of the latter type is screen adaptation (type 5 in Table 3.1).

- (a) Conventional translation – with both intrasemiotic and intersemiotic types represented – uses some degree of formulaic conversion of the source text *en route* to the target text. With target texts created through anything from strict conversion algorithms (as in Morse encryption, for instance) to methods relying on norms and conventions (as when dictionaries and other sources of reference are used as tools in interlingual, written translation), the direct link between source and target texts is obvious, and criteria for evaluation are easily established – although not always totally agreed upon.
- (b) Adaptational translation, on the other hand, is found whenever the existence and reception of one text triggers the production of another based on the first. The resulting text will relate to the original in a way which is more detached and less predictable than in conventional translation. Following from this is the inability to reconstruct the original from the translated version, something which – to a certain extent – is possible with conventional translation.

The terms “conventional” and “adaptational” have been employed partly in order to pinpoint the difference between the two conceptual counterparts, partly to make room for a wider interpretation of the notion of translation than seen whenever “translation proper” and “adaptation” are juxtaposed. However, these two counterparts are not poles at each end of a line; rather, they constitute two halves of a cline ranging from zero degrees of freedom (as in intralingual transliteration – type 33 in Table 3.2) to almost total freedom, as when music is translated into moving pictures (type 2 in Table 3.1).

IV Verbal vs. nonverbal translation

- (a) Verbal translations are translations that retain their verbal channel. These include all inter- and intralingual translations, ranging from an American remake of a Japanese movie to the transliteration of Arabic words into Latin lettering, as found in written Maltese. Verbal translations are by definition intrasemiotic.
- (b) Translations that introduce nonverbal elements include genres as disparate as poetry turned into songs and non-smoking pictograms in bars and restaurants. These are examples of deverbalised translation.
- (c) Some translations introduce verbal elements, as when a sign language user is interpreted into a vocal language, or a text in Morse code is decrypted. These types are examples of verbalised translation.
- (d) Finally, translations that remain nonverbal include linguistic entities (such as interpreting between two sign languages) as well as non-linguistic ones, e.g. a two-dimensional drawing of a sculpture. Here we talk about nonverbal translation. As is true of deverbalising and verbalising translation, nonverbal translation is by definition intersemiotic.

Different roles of translation: Substitutes vs. supplements

The taxonomy represented by Tables 3.1 and 3.2 is based on the four main distinctions listed as points I–IV above. Through this systematic categorisation, all existing and potential types of translation should be represented – categorised according to their semiotic qualities.

Based on the broad definition of “text” provided earlier in this chapter, the taxonomy categorises the various types of translation from the end user’s perspective, and in doing so, encompasses three kinds of cognitive decoding activity:

1. Translations acting as text substitutes for audiences who, due to (a) sensory, or (b) linguistic impairment are expected to be unable to decode the original, as well as (c) people who for practical reasons cannot make use of it. An example of the first case is signed news on television, which – to a deaf audience – replaces radio news for hearing audiences. In the second case, when DVD audiences lack the command of the foreign language heard on screen and select a domestic-language soundtrack, the resulting viewing experience emulates that of watching a domestic production. The third type of audience is made up of people who, for example, want to enjoy a book while driving a car or doing household chores, by listening to an audiobook.
2. Translations as text enhancers, e.g. when a PowerPoint presentation shows numerical relations turned into graphics, thus boosting the impact of the original figures, which on their own terms may not be cognitively fully comprehensible to the audience.
3. Translations that are cognitively supplementary, as when audiences have simultaneous access to, and (partly) understand, the original text. This phenomenon is mainly found in the audiovisual media, as multilingual audiences read subtitles while listening to the original dialogue. In this mode of reception, widespread in subtitling countries, the polyglot viewer processes dialogue and subtitles as “diamesic twins”, while oscillating between using subtitles as an aid to understanding the original dialogue, and using the original dialogue to evaluate, and often criticise, the subtitles. This doubling of verbal channels is also found when a DVD is played with both subtitles and soundtrack in the target language.

Whereas reception modes 1 and 2 are intended by the translational agents (the translator, the publisher/broadcaster, etc.), mode 3 is an unintended spin-off from mode 1b, disturbing traditional views of translation as text substitutes, or at least (intersemiotic) text enhancers. The game of “spot-the-error” enabled by reception mode 3 has long been a national pastime in Scandinavia, the result being that in working from English, subtitlers – in constant fear of being accused of not giving the “precise” translation of what is said – sometimes prefer unnatural-sounding constructions (Gottlieb 2014). Hopefully, when optional subtitles find their way from DVD to digital TV reception mode 3 in viewers watching foreign productions will vanish, leaving subtitlers with the degrees of freedom enjoyed by translators producing substitutional translations (Gottlieb 2015, 40–41).

The translational range explained through examples

In the following sections, each type of translation found in the comprehensive taxonomy presented in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 will be treated successively.

Intersemiotic translation

Intersemiotic translation, in which the semiotic channels used in the translated product differ from those of the original, encompasses the following types:

Adaptational types

Nonverbal translation: Nonverbal → nonverbal text

1. In this diasemiotic type, the human agent operates between two different, monosemiotic types of expression (= texts), e.g. when converting a visual expression to a musical one.
2. A striking example of this ultrasemiotic type, in which the semantic texture becomes more complex in translation, is the animated Disney cartoon *Fantasia* (1940), which presents the musical works of Bach, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and others while at the same time reflecting the musical score in moving images.
3. A case of the opposite movement, that of semiotic simplification, is found when, for instance, a person draws a sketch of the way bees communicate to give directions to an attractive flowerbed. While the original text produced by the bee is spatial and includes sound signals, the drawing – meant for an encyclopedia, for example – is two-dimensional and mute.

Deverbalised translation: Verbal → not (only) verbal text

4. When making a written manual useful to illiterates by replacing the written signs with nonverbal illustrations, the translator will produce a text of similar semiotic complexity as that of the original, i.e. a monosemiotic text.
5. One of the few non-interlingual examples often discussed in Translation Studies belongs in this ultrasemiotic category: screen adaptation – in which a monosemiotic work (typically, a novel) is semiotically “dissected” and recreated using the underlying (poly)semiotic structure of the dramatic work.
6. When, for instance, a play is turned into mime, vocal language is lost, and movements matter more than when they are counterbalanced by words. With this type of translation, there are fewer channels to carry the semantic load that was shared by a larger number of channels in the original. A documented example of this infrasemiotic type is Max Ernst’s painting *Oedipus Rex*, a conversion of the Greek drama by the same name (Stathi 2015, 324).

Verbalised translation: Nonverbal → verbal text

7. Verbalised texts in this diasemiotic category include phenomena that are relayed to an audience bereft of the ability to comprehend the original text, i.e. a radio-transmitted baseball match, in which the natural sound effects are kept in the background, while the visual action on the field is substituted by verbal narration.
8. Representing the same ballgame on TV constitutes a different type of translation. Here, the verbal layer added by the commentator supplements what the viewer already sees on the TV screen. In this way, apart from the missing ambience of the stadium, TV viewers get “more” information than the spectators at the stadium.
9. Perhaps the best-known example of infrasemiotic translation is novelisation – screen adaptation reversed, so to speak, as relevant nonverbal filmic elements are verbalised and – together with the spoken lines – published in book format. A further example of the complexities of polysemiotic translation is audio description on TV. In this procedure, the translator transfers the content of two channels – nonverbal image (pictorial content) and verbal image (existing captions and displays; sometimes even interlingual subtitles) – into one: a verbal depiction, presented (optionally) as an integral part of the film soundtrack, whether original or dubbed. Audio description is thus a modern-day

version of the classic tradition of *ekphrasis*, in which “a verbal text describes a work of visual art” (Eco 2004, 110). The reason for considering this type (which might be considered additive) infrasemiotic is that although some of the visual information of a film is represented through audio description, the fact remains that the entire film is now communicated to the intended audience through two channels only: the verbal oral and the nonverbal oral channels. The verbal visual and nonverbal visual channels remain inaccessible to the Blind, who are the very *raison d'être* of audio description – a type of translation that has gained much scholarly attention (see, for instance, Benecke 2004; Kruger and Orero 2010; and Szarkowska 2011).

Conventional types

Nonverbal translation: Nonverbal → nonverbal text

10. A classic example of this diasemiotic type is written music, in which each note in a sequence denotes pitch as well as duration. As with other types of conventional translation, there is some leeway of interpretation – not only when working from written to performed music, but also when trying to translate (notate) live music to paper.
11. Instead of merely switching between channels of representation – as in the previous example – we are concerned here with adding new semiotic layers to the original text, *in casu* statistical information. Dealing with numbers, which – although part of the alphanumeric reality of written communication – can hardly be termed verbal, illustrating numerical relations by means of bar or pie charts while keeping the actual figures as part of the graphic whole is an example of this ultrasemiotic type of translation.
12. In contrast to the previous two types, we are talking here about translations that use fewer semiotic channels than those present in the original – a case in point being ballet notation, in which choreography, i.e. complex three-dimensional movements in real time, is represented on paper.

Deverbalised translation: Verbal → not (only) verbal text

13. Pictograms, road signs and nonverbal logos are examples of conventional translation of verbal messages. Interestingly, certain speech communities use these nonverbal messages much more than others. As regards traffic signs, for instance, the Anglo-American tradition is heavily verbal, with messages like “No entry” (Figure 3.1) commonly seen on roads, while elsewhere, the international nonverbal sign (Figure 3.3) is favoured.
14. Translating stage directions into theatrical performance is a key example of ultrasemiotic translation, in which an all-verbal message is “fleshed out” into spoken lines plus body language and movements on stage.
15. An example of infrasemiotic deverbalisation is found when the Anglophone “combined” no entry sign (Figure 3.2) is replaced by the international (nonverbal) traffic sign with the same message (Figure 3.3) – a reversal of the process exemplified in type 13.

Verbalised translation: Nonverbal → verbal text

16. The encryption and decryption of Morse code is a perfect example of diasemiotic translation, with the unique feature that a 1:1 relationship is found between original and translation, meaning that translating the same message back and forth will not in any way alter the semantic content. Morse code is an extreme exponent of conventional translation, with no “artistic license” granted to the translator.



Figure 3.1 Monosemiotic verbal visual text



Figure 3.2 Polysemiotic verbal and nonverbal visual text

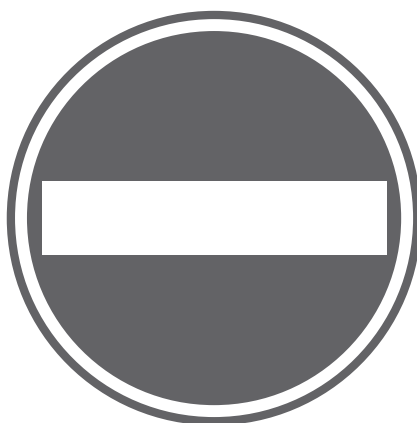


Figure 3.3 Monosemiotic nonverbal visual text

17. When perceived by target-language audiences other than those intended, certain semiotic channels may yield little or no information. As a case in point, hearing conference participants (who do not understand sign language) for whom a sign language user is being interpreted into a vocal language will experience two semiotic layers in the message addressed to them: the almost entirely incomprehensible (soundless) sign language and the spoken language. So although this is a case of “more channels” perceived by the user – providing that s/he is not blind or visually impaired – the original text (signing) remains almost void of information. Here, the hearing target user possesses the sensory capabilities for comprehension, but lacks the skills for encryption of the sign language code.
18. A typical source text for this intrasemiotic type of translation, a “conventional” parallel to type 9, is graphics (3-D pie charts including numbers), the target text of type 11. When communicating the content of such charts to blind audiences, the information from two semiotic channels is condensed into one: oral communication.

Intrasemiotic translation

In intrasemiotic translation we are dealing with what can be termed “reformulation of a given expression within the same semiotic system” (Eco 2004, 131).

Adaptational types

Certain intrasemiotic adaptational translations, e.g. a stage play turned into a film (with both texts using the same semiotic channels) may strictly speaking be a result of two intersemiotic processes: that of turning the “live” play into a written screenplay, followed by the process of unfolding that monosemiotic text and creating the final movie. Still, by comparing the resulting text with the original, the total process may fairly be labelled intrasemiotic translation.

Nonverbal translation: Nonverbal → nonverbal text

19. A well-known exponent of this type is re-interpretation in the form of a new musical arrangement of an existing work, for instance a jazz standard. The result is a different textual expression within the semiotic confines of performed music. (In contradistinction to this, transposing a piece of music is conventional and thus a type 22 translation.)

Interlingual translation: L1 text → L2 text

20. In the interlingual subcategory falls the remaking of films. A remake transplants the entire film, setting and all, into the target culture. The resulting film may appear to be an original work, but as it is based on an existing storyline etc., it is indeed a translation (Evans 2014).

Intralingual translation: L1 text → new L1 text

21. Remaining within the realm of film, an intralingual example of adaptational translation is the remake of a domestic film classic. With the exception of screen adaptations of plays by authors like Shakespeare, such new versions of old films either alter outdated elements of the script, or base themselves on an entirely new dialogue list.

Conventional types

Nonverbal translation: Nonverbal → nonverbal text

22. Nonverbal translation includes a wide range of translational acts. When transposing (written) music from one key to another, the “transposer” stays within the semiotic boundaries of written music. Likewise, when, for instance, American Sign Language users are interpreted for deaf audiences in Britain who use British Sign Language, this is done through a bilingual sign interpreter – strictly within the confines of the semiotic system “signing”, in this taxonomy categorised as “nonverbal”.

Interlingual translation: L1 text → L2 text

Synchronic translation

23. To most non-experts, of the 34 types offered in this taxonomy, only this and types 24 and 27 qualify as translation. In traditional terms, interlingual, conventional and isomesic translation *is* translation. And, to be fair, cell 23 in the matrix of translation is packed with a number of translational sub-types and genres. Apart from printed translations, community interpreting and dubbing are also examples of this dominant type of translation. What is common to all these interlingual sub-types is that they retain the semiotic composition of the original while recreating the semantic content in another (vocal) language.

Diachronic translation

24. When studying translation, a striking paradox lies in the fact that translations often come closer to a meaningful representation of the original than the original itself. This is not only true of carefully edited translations of sloppy originals, but especially relevant when the time dimension is involved. Old texts in any language are more difficult to read than new translations in the same language.

Dialectal translation

25. More often than not, dialectal elements in a foreign text are standardised as part of “normal” (type 23 or 24) interlingual translation. However, some texts are written entirely in dialect, a fairly recent example being the 1993 novel *Trainspotting*, written (by Irvine Welsh) in what is best described as a near-phonetic spelling of modern Scots’ junkie lingo. The Norwegian version was a clear-cut example of interlingual dialectal translation; the localised version reading (almost) like a standard Norwegian novel.

Diaphasic translation

26. One much-cited example of this interlingual type is the foreign versions of Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales. These were – and still are – typically retold for children, rather than translated in extenso, with both children and adults in mind, as the author originally intended (Pedersen 2004).

Transliteration

27. This type of interlingual translation is found whenever verbal messages in one writing system are translated to verbal messages in another language and another writing system.

This means that a very high proportion of the world's language combinations yield this type of translation, for example whenever translating between Chinese and Western languages. Even in the European Union, now with three writing systems (Latin, Greek and Cyrillic), interlingual transliteration is a common occurrence.

Diamesic translation

28. It has been pointed out that “[f]ilm adaptations are visible remains of an invisible process” (Stathi 2015, 336). This is true of most types of translation, but subtitling, with the original still audible and visible onscreen, is a different story. Subtitling is an additive type of translation, in which intersemiotic feedback and redundancy play a major role (Gottlieb 2013). Although “crossing over” from the oral to the written mode, and thus deserving the term “diagonal translation” (Gottlieb 1994), subtitling is considered intrasemiotic in this taxonomy. It could be argued that as part of the diamesic shift (from speech to writing) subtitling – as well as its semiotic twin, opera surtitling (Dewolf 2001) – would qualify as intersemiotic (cf. Chuang 2006). However, as what is verbal in the source text remains verbal, this movement from spoken lines to written text is considered intralingual, while the transfer from language 1 to language 2 – whenever foreign-language productions are subtitled – is what places “normal” subtitling firmly in the interlingual category. Another argument in favour of considering subtitling intersemiotic, namely that the written subtitles are an added semiotic channel only found in the translated film, must be refuted as well. The reason for this is that as (original-language) film and television make use of written signs – in the form of captions and displays – the semiotic *composition* as such is not changed through subtitling, although the semiotic *balance* is undeniably shifted from largely aural to predominantly visual-language reception. However, with time – and depending on national educational systems, etc. – the communicative power of the written subtitles may decrease as audiences pick up not only intonational cues, but also substantial semantic and stylistic elements in the original dialogue.

Intralingual translation: L1 text → new L1 text

Synchronic translation

29. Synchronic translation includes cases where a target text is presented as an alternative to the source text, while aimed at the same audience and written in the same language and register. Target texts may range from abridged print versions of manuals to expanded online versions of magazine articles.

Diachronic translation

30. As mentioned above (see type 24), intralingual “updating” of texts is not always well received in literary circles; although the Dano-Norwegian playwright Holberg may be difficult to understand for modern Scandinavians, modernised versions of his plays are rarely offered. However, few protest if non-literary texts, e.g. technical instructions, are brought up to date. The dialogue in dubbed film classics, especially in animated Disney-style pictures, is also often exposed to diachronic translation – normally an intralingual procedure, as the original dialogue need not be consulted.

Dialectal translation

31. It is not always considered politically correct to translate sociolectal features or utterances by dialect speakers into standard language. However, it often happens in subtitled countries whenever immigrants or people speaking with a “heavy” local accent are interviewed on TV. Equally relevant is the reverse phenomenon, where messages in standard language are translated into the local dialect, often for political rather than communicative reasons.

Diaphasic translation

32. This type of translation is commonly seen in situations where public authorities wish to communicate more effectively with clients or voters by making syntactically complex and expert-sounding texts easier to read for the non-expert. The focal point here is adapting the message to a different – yet still domestic – audience.

Transliteration

33. In communicating speech sounds in Arabic to Western readers, for instance, it may be necessary to transliterate the Arabic letters into Latin letters; an indisputable case of transliteration. A borderline case is found when, for example, aged German texts written in *Fraktur* (Gothic letters) are reset in a modern font in order for young Germans to be able to read them.

Diamesic translation

34. The simplest example of this intralingual type is transcription (taking speech down in writing), as when the spoken slogan in a TV commercial is reinforced by simultaneously presenting it in writing. The same diamesic duplication is found when hearing audiences watch domestic-language TV programmes with subtitles intended for non-hearing viewers. Although aimed at deaf people, domestic productions with optional (teletext or digital) subtitles are enjoyed by many elderly people and others with a hearing deficiency (Neves 2005; Matamala and Orero 2010; Romero-Fresco 2015). Most of these subtitles are simply diamesic – albeit sometimes condensed – versions of the lines spoken onscreen; hence this categorisation as “intralingual”. Still, seen in isolation, the instances where sound effects are rendered in the subtitles – as for instance “Doorbell rings” or “Waves washing ashore” – would qualify for membership of the intersemiotic type 18: infrasemiotic verbalisation. A reverse example of intralingual diamesic translation is the production of audiobooks, which – as pointed out earlier – are listened to not only by visually impaired or dyslexic audiences, but also by normally sighted persons.

On categorisation and beyond

Having established a supposedly all-embracing taxonomy of translation, in which no translational act or artefact should be deprived of categorisation, I must hasten to state that with semiotically complex entities such as various online texts and other electronic media products, categorisation is not always a matter of course. Different foci may lead to different categorisations, or – more accurately phrased – as several text types are semiotic composites or mosaics, any categorisation of such hybrid entities will have to consider the “odd” parts of the text.

As a case in point, some video games are marketed with translated captions (i.e. written onscreen messages) while the spoken dialogue is the original (English) lines (see also O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013; Bernal-Merino 2015). Similarly, localised web pages often “forget” to translate certain textual elements, ranging from drop-down menus to video clips.

Some translated audiovisual productions may also be categorised differently, depending on which elements are considered. An interesting example is found when foreign films with captions and displays in Latin letters are voiced-over – an interlingual isosemiotic translation procedure favoured especially in Slavonic speech communities (Franco, Matamala and Orero 2010) – into languages using Cyrillic script. Not only will such written signs be read aloud by the narrator, thus representing interlingual diamesic translation; even “untranslatable” names will have to be read aloud, since they are encoded in an alphabet unknown to the common viewer – a case of transliteration. This means that different elements of, for instance, an American movie voiced-over for Russian audiences may be referred to three different translational categories: type 23 (interlingual synchronic translation of dialogue) and types 28 and 27 combined (interlingual diamesic translation of original English captions via transliteration) – a logical outcome of the intricate relations between the original polysemiotic mosaic and its translated version.

Acknowledging such hybrid entities as part of the fascination in the multidimensional world of translation, it is my hope that the taxonomy discussed above will prove exhaustive and accommodate all types of present and future translational phenomena – no matter in which medium they will take place.

Further reading

BITRA, Bibliography of Translation and Interpreting. University of Alicante: https://aplicacionesua.cpd.ua.es/tra_int/usu/buscar.asp?idioma=en (DOI: 10.14198/bitra)

This online bibliography, accessible in several languages, contains over 69,000 entries (by August 2017). It includes not only nearly all publications on translation, but also a large number of unpublished university dissertations and theses.

Kourdis, E. and Kukkonen, P., eds. 2015. *Semiotics of Translation, Translation in Semiotics*. Special issue of *Punctum: International Journal of Semiotics* 1(2). Available from: <http://punctum.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Punctum12-final.pdf>.

A collection of scholarly articles including titles on the semiotics and the role of language in translating films, advertisements and visual art.

O’Hagan, M., ed. 2006. *Anime, Manga and Video Games*. Special issue of *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 14(4).

The first collection published on the translation of these polysemiotic genres.

Petrilli, S. 2014. *Sign Studies and Semioethics: Communication, Translation and Values*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

An impressive and thorough discussion of translation in the wider context of theoretical semiotics by an author who has published widely in this field.

Remael, A., Orero, P and Carroll, M., eds. 2012. *Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility at the Crossroads. Media for All 3*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

A splendid and diverse collection of papers on various aspects and methods of audiovisual translation.

Related topics

Semantics and translation; Non-verbal communication and interpreting.

References

- Baldry, A. and Thibault, P. J. 2006. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis: A Multimedia Toolkit and Coursebook*. London: Equinox.
- Bassnett, S. 2014. *Translation Studies*. 4th ed. [1st ed. 1980]. London: Routledge.
- Benecke, B. 2004. Audio-description. *Meta* 49(1), pp. 78–80.
- Bernal-Merino, M. Á. 2015. *Translation and Localisation in Video Games: Making Entertainment Software Global*. London: Routledge.
- Chaume, F. 2004. Film studies and translation studies: two disciplines at stake in audiovisual translation. *Meta* 49(1), pp. 12–24.
- Chuang, Y.-T. 2006. Studying subtitle translation from a multi-modal approach. *Babel* 52(4), pp. 372–383.
- Dewolf, L. 2001. “Surtitling Operas. With examples of Translations from German into French and Dutch”. In *(Multi) Media Translation: Concepts, Practices, and Research*, edited by Y. Gambier and H. Gottlieb, 179–188. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dusi, N. 2015. Intersemiotic translation: theories, problems, analyses. *Semiotica* 206, pp. 181–205.
- Eco, U. 1980. *Il nome della rosa*. Milan: Bompiani. Available from: <https://profssamonicaguido.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/rosa.pdf>.
- Eco, U. 1983. *The Name of the Rose*. William Weaver (trans.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Eco, U. 2004. *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*. London: Phoenix. [Original edition 2003.]
- Evans, J. 2014. Film remakes, the black sheep of translation. *Translation Studies* 7(3), pp. 300–314.
- Franco, E., Matamala, A. and Orero, P. 2010. *Voice-Over Translation. An Overview*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Gambier, Y. and Gottlieb, H., eds. 2001. *(Multi) Media Translation: Concepts, Practices, and Research*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gottlieb, H. 1994. Subtitling: diagonal translation. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 2(1), pp. 101–121.
- Gottlieb, H. 2003. Parameters of translation. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 11(3), pp. 167–187.
- Gottlieb, H. 2005. “Multidimensional Translation: Semantics turned Semiotics”. In *Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra: Challenges of Multidimensional Translation – Saarbrücken 2–6 May 2005*, edited by S. Nauert and H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast, 33–61. Available from: www.translationconcepts.org/pdf/MuTra_2005_Proceedings.pdf#page=37.
- Gottlieb, H. 2008 [2010]. “Multidimensional Translation”. In *Understanding Translation*, edited by A. Schjoldager with H. Gottlieb and I. Klitgård, 39–65. Copenhagen: Academica.
- Gottlieb, H. 2013. “Subtitles: Readable Dialogue?” In *Eye Tracking in Audiovisual Translation*, edited by E. Perego, 37–79. Roma: Aracne Editrice.
- Gottlieb, H. 2014. “Foreign Voices, Local Lines: In Defense of Visibility and Domestication in Subtitling”. In *Subtitling and Intercultural Communication*, edited by B. Garzelli and M. Baldo, 27–54. *Interlinguistica 1. Studi contrastivi tra Lingue e Culture*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS.
- Gottlieb, H. 2015. “Different Viewers, Different Needs: Personal Subtitles for Danish TV?” In *The Reception of Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Europe*, edited by P. Romero Fresco, 17–44. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Jakobson, R. 1959 [2000]. “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”. In *On Translation*, edited by R. A. Brower, 232–239. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Reprinted in L. Venuti, ed. 2000. *The Translation Studies Reader*, 113–118. London: Routledge. (Second edition 2004.)
- Kourdis, E. 2015. “Semiotics of Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Translation”. In *International Handbook of Semiotics*, edited by P. P. Trifonas, 303–320. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Kress, G. 2010. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Kruger, J.-L. and Orero, P., eds. 2010. Audio Description, Audio Narration: A New Era in AVT. Special issue of *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 18(3).
- Matamala, A. and Orero, P., eds. 2010. *Listening to Subtitles: Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*. Bern: Peter Lang.

- Neather, R. 2012. Intertextuality, translation, and the semiotics of museum presentation: the case of bilingual texts in Chinese museums. *Semiotica* 192, pp. 197–218.
- Neves, J. 2005. *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing*. PhD dissertation, School of Arts, Roehampton University. Available from: <http://rrp.roehampton.ac.uk/cgi/artstheses/1>.
- O'Hagan, M. and Mangiron, C. 2013. *Game Localization: Translating for the Global Digital Entertainment Industry*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Pedersen, V. H. 2004. *Ugly Ducklings? Studies in the English Translations of Hans Christian Andersen's Tales and Stories*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Poyatos, F., ed. 1997. *Nonverbal Communication and Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Romero-Fresco, P., ed. 2015. *The Reception of Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Europe*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Stathi, I. 2015. "Inter-semiotic Translation and Transfer Theory in Cinematic/Audiovisual Adaptations of Greek Drama". In *International Handbook of Semiotics*, edited by P. P. Trifonas 321–338. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Stecconi, U. 2009. "Semiotics". In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 2nd ed., edited by M. Baker and G. Saldanha. London: Routledge.
- Stecconi, U. 2010. "Semiotics and Translation". In *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Vol. 1, edited by Y. Gambier and L. van Doorslaer, 314–319. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Szarkowska, A. 2011. Text-to-speech audio description: towards wider availability of AD. *Journal of Specialised Translation* 15, pp. 142–162. Available from: www.jostrans.org/issue15/art_szarkowska.pdf.
- Torop, P. 2008. Translation and semiotics. *Sign Systems Studies* 2, pp. 253–258. Available from: www.ceeol.com.
- Toury, G. 1986/2010. "Translation, a Cultural-Semiotic Perspective". In *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, edited by T. A. Sebeok (3rd revised and updated ed. 2010, edited by Marcel Danesi). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Vassallo, C. 2015. What's so proper about translation? Or interlingual translation and interpretive semiotics. *Semiotica* 206, pp. 161–179.
- Zabalbeascoa, P. 1997. "Dubbing and the Nonverbal Dimension of Translation". In *Nonverbal Communication and Translation*, edited by F. Poyatos, 327–342. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.