TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF TRANSLATIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

While many general works on translation contain very partial and tentative typologies of translations, no exhaustive and well-established one exists so far. And yet, every selfrespecting discipline has its taxonomy, which helps to classify knowledge about the discipline and focus attention on specific aspects. Indeed, As Mary Snell-Hornby has noted (1988: 26), «the tendency to categorize is innate in man and essential to all scientific development». However, the relatively young discipline of translation studies still needs to develop a detailed classification of translation types, and this paper is an attempt in that direction.

First I will analyze some existing typologies. Then, using them as a starting point, I will attempt to establish a more complete classification of translations considered from several different points of view. I will also suggest basic criteria for the categorization of texts within the proposed types, so that the classification thus proposed can be of practical use to translation researchers, translation professionals and translation users alike. A major difference between the proposed typology and existing ones lies in its attempt to bring together distinct classifications established from different perspectives.

II. EXISTING TYPOLOGIES

Existing typologies fall into two major categories which have relatively little in common: those which have been established from the point of view of translation studies and those which have been proposed from the point of view of the translation profession. The focus of the former is more on classifying translations on the basis of the source text, while the latter concentrate on classification on the basis of the target text produced by the process of translation. This and other differences will become apparent as I analyze first the classifications of Delisle and Newmark, and then those of Snell/Crampton, and Sager.¹ Characteristics² that seem to constitute the basis for the different classes proposed by these authors are included in our analysis,³ although they are often not specified by the authors themselves.

Jean Delisle identifies eight classes of translations on the basis of four distinct characteristics:

a) According to the *function of the source text*, he distinguishes between «traduction de textes pragmatiques» or pragmatic translation, and «traduction de textes littéraires» or literary translation (1980: 29-34). The former involves the translation of a predominantly informative text, whereas the latter covers the translation of a text in which the expressive and aesthetic functions predominate.

b) According to the degree of specialization in the source text, he differentiates between «traduction de textes généraux» or general translation, which requires little or no specialized knowledge, and «traduction de textes spécialisés» or specialized translation, which does call for such specialized knowledge (1980: 25).

c) According to the general purpose of translating, he separates «traduction scolaire» or academic translation, whose goal is language acquisition for the translator, from «traduction professionnelle» or professional translation, whose objective is the transmission of a message to a translation user (1980: 40-43).

d) According to the *translation approach used in producing the target text*, he makes a distinction between «transcodage» or transcoding, which results in word equivalence, and «traduc-



¹ These were chosen because they are more detailed than those of others.

² The term «characteristic» is used here in the sense of a quality that distinguishes an object.

³Characteristics are presented in italics in the classifications analyzed or proposed.

tion» or translation (proper), which produces message equivalence (1980: 58-69).⁴

Delisle makes no attempt to link these different classifications. Hence, although he has tried to show how translations can be categorized, he has not really established a typology of translations.

The same can be said of Peter Newmark (1981, 1988 and 1991), whose classification efforts are surprisingly similar to those of Jean Delisle. Indeed, three of the characteristics identified by Delisle (source text function, general purpose of translating, and translation approach) reappear in Newmark's five-fold classification of translations.

a) According to the *function of the source text*, Newmark distinguishes between translation of an expressive text, which focusses on the author and his style, translation of an informative text, which emphasizes the content, and translation of a vocative text, where the focus is on thereader (1981: 12-15; 1989: 39-42).⁵

b) According to the *style of the source text*, he differentiates between translation of narration, translation of description, translation of discussion, and translation of dialogue (1989: 13).⁶

c) According to the *content* or *subject* matter of the source text, he makes a distinction between scientific-technological translation, institutional-cultural translation, and literary translation (1991: 36-37).

d) According to the general purpose of translating, he separates translation for language teaching from translation for professional purposes (1991: 61-64).

e) Finally, according to the translation approach used in producing the target text, he distinguishes primarily between two main types of translation, semantic translation, which

«attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning» (1981: 39), and communicative translation, which «attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original» (1981: 39).⁷ At other points in his works, Newmark groups these two types of translations with others based on particular methods, such as word-for-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation, free translation and adaptation (1989: 45-53).

Although, at first glance, Newmark's classification seems more detailed than Delisle's, he does not always specify clearly the distinguishing characteristics of the various types. For example, the distinction between scientifictechnological translation and institutional-cultural translation remains vague, despite his subsequent attempt to differentiate between them by describing the former as «potentially (but far from actually) non-cultural, therefore universal» and the latter as «cultural... unless concerned with international organizations» (1989: 151). A second, more serious problem is that of fluctuation in categories and even in characteristics used for classification. Thus, the three-fold division of translations, on the basis of source text content, into scientific-technological, institutional-cultural and literary (established in 1983) not only lapses into a two-fold division (scientific-technological and institutionalcultural), but the basis for the division changes from content to something totally different (the degree of «uni-versality» of the source text).

While both Newmark and Delisle concentrate relatively heavily on classification of translations on the basis of the source text (three out of Newmark's five characteristics and two out of Delisle's four are source-text-based), other translation scholars are even more source-textoriented. Thus, the starting point for Mary Snell-Homby's integrated concept of translation studies (1988: 31-35) is literary translation, general translation and special language translation, on the basis of a characteristic of the

⁷Newmark considers the distinction that he has established between semantic and communicative translation to be his «main contribution to translation theory» (*Approaches to Translation*, 1981, p. X).



⁴This categorization derives from the interpretative theory of the Paris (ÉSIT) school and is developed in Danica Seleskovitch's work (cfr. *Langage, langues et mémoire*, 1975, p. 53-56).

⁵This categorization is based on Karl Bühler's 1934 statement of the functions of language and its application to translation-relevant text typology by Katherina Reiß (in *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Übersetzungskritik*, 1971, p. 31ff).

⁶This categorization derives from Eugene Nida's division of discourse structure types (cfr. Nida and Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures*, 1981, p. 42-45).

source text. The trend in professionally-oriented typologies of translation, illustrated below by Snell/Crampton and Sager, is, on the contrary, far more target-text-based.

Barbara Snell and Patricia Crampton's classification (1983) is based on seven characteristics, six of which focus on the translation itself.

a) According to the *content*, *degree of style*, and *function of the source text*, they distinguish between literary translation (which includes books of all kinds, literary and scientific), translation of promotional and instructional material (covering advertising copy, publicity and sales literature, service manuals, etc.), and translation of informatory material (such as legal and official documents and scientific papers) (1983: 109-117).

b) According to the general purpose of translating, they differentiate between non-commercial translation (which is done for pleasure or as a language acquisition exercise) and professional translation (which is undertaken for a customer against remuneration) (1983: 109).

c) According to the *function of the translation*, they make a distinction between translation for publication and translation for information (1983: 111, 114).

d) According to the *degree of style involved in the translation*, they discriminate between literary translation (where style is most important), translation of informatory material (where style is least important) and translation of promotional and instructional material (where style may be important) (1983: 109-117).⁸

e) According to the *«integrality»* of the translation, they separate translation (proper) (i.e. translation of the full text) from extraction of information (e.g. summary translation) (1983: 117-118).

f) According to the *direction of the translation*, they distinguish between translation into the mother tongue and translation out of the mother tongue (1983: 119-120).

g) According to the *medium* of the translation, they differentiate between written translation and oral (or spoken word) translation (the latter covering not only interpretation, but also dubbing, subtitling and translating aloud for a customer) (1983: 118-119).

Snell/Crampton's classification is somewhat confusing in that there is some overlap between theoretically different categories treated by the two authors. Thus, some oral translations (translations done aloud for a customer) are covered under «extraction of information» (perhaps because often only parts of a text are translated aloud), while others (dubbing and subtitling) are treated separately under the subheading «The spoken word»). Such overlap may be due to the fact that the two authors, each responsible for particular sections of the classification, did not establish clear boundaries between the categories that each was to treat. This may also explain why their attempt to hierarchize the various types of translation - which most translation scholars do not attempt to do - is not at all successful.*

Juan Carlos Sager's classification of translation types is also hierarchized and is even presented in tabular form (1983: 125), but his hierarchy seems equally confusing at first sight (cfr. Annex 1). However, many of the categories of translation that he has proposed in the text (cfr. *b*, *e* and *f* below) are novel in comparison with those suggested by others).

a) According to the *content or function of the source text*, he distinguishes between literary translation and non-literary translation (although he deals only with non-literary translation) (1983: 125).

b) According to the *status of the translation*, determined by what Sager terms «the translation's communicative function in relation to the original», he differentiates between translation which is a full substitute for the monolingual reader (which he designates as Type A), translation which is an alternative to the original and coexists with it (Type B; example: a multilingual brochure) and translation which is a full equal of



⁸Although the types of translation designated in this category are the same as those in a), they are considered from the point of view of the translation, and not the source text.

⁹The attempt at hierarchization is visible in the typefaces and formatting. However, there are clearcut contradictions between the major divisions and subdivisions indicated graphically and those that can be deduced from the text itself. My presentation of Snell/Crampton's categories is based on the content of the text and not on its formal presentation.

the original and can serve as a basis for other translation (Type C) (1983: 122-123).

c) According to the *«integrality»* of the translation, he separates full translation and selective translation (1983: 122).

d) According to the *function of the translation*, he makes a distinction between translation for publication (which includes publication for prestige and for public record) and translation for other specific purposes (for information, for information and future reference, etc.) (1983: 124).

e) According to the *translation approach used in producing the target text*, he distinguishes primarily between writer-oriented translation and reader-oriented translation (1983: 123-124).

f) According to the *communicative function* of the target text in relation to the source text, he makes a distinction between translation with the same function as the original and translation with a new function in relation to the original (1983: 124, 125).

g) According to the degree of modification introduced in the target text, he distinguishes between translation with modification of the original and translation without modification of the original. Sager provides contract translation as an example of translation without modification (presumably because every detail in a contract must be reproduced without change in translation if the latter is to be legally valid), and multilingual legislation as an example of translation with modification (presumably because the style and format of legislative drafting varies from one language to another) (1983: 125).

Sager really does not develop his concept of each of these text types very much. He presents them briefly in the context of an article entitled «Quality and Standards - the Evaluation of Translations». His purpose in doing so consists in demonstrating that «Different types of texts require different methods of translation and lead to different end products» (1983: 121), that «there is no ideal type of translation for any of these forms [text types] but rather any organization which regularly requires translation decides the function of translations in the overall system of communication» (1983: 121), and that «any evaluation [of translations] involves both comparison and measurement on a relative or absolute scale» (1983: 122). However undeveloped his categories, poorly named his translation types or incoherent his hierarchical table may be, the characteristics he uses for classification are nevertheless important for any typology of translations.

One of the reasons why Sager's hierarchical classification of types of translation does not seem to work and a probable reason for the lack of a hierarchical classification in the work of most translation scholars and professionals who have proposed translation types is the problem of multidimensionality. Multidimensionality has been defined by Lynne Bowker (1992: 1) as «a phenomenon of classification that arises when objects can be classified in more than one way». Since classification involves grouping similar objects into a class on the basis of a common characteristic, if objects in a given class can be distinguished on the basis of more than one characteristic, they can be classified in more than one way. A classification with more than one dimension (i.e. way of classifying a group of objects) is said to be multidimensional. It is clear from the translation types analyzed above that any proposed classification of translations needs to be multidimensional. for objects in the class of translation can be, and have been, distinguished on the basis of more than one characteristic. However, what Delisle, Newmark and, to some extent, Snell/Crampton have done is to present several unidimensional classifications of translations. And Sager's attempt to represent multidimensionality, i.e. to consider different ways of classifying translation simultaneously, is both limited and unsatisfactory.

III. PROPOSED TYPOLOGY

In order to be as complete as possible in my own classification, I began by establishing two distinct typologies of translation: the first looking at translation from the point of view of the source text, the second from that of the target text.

The characteristics of the source text used to group translations together and the subclasses identified by means of them are presented below in hierarchical order. Further criteria are



provided to enable the classification of translations into the proposed subtypes.

1. According to the overall ST function, translations are divided into pragmatic and literary. The general function of a pragmatic text is to be of «immediate practical use»,¹⁰ that of a literary text is to be aesthetically appealing. A literary text can be distinguished from a pragmatic text by the number and kind of rhetorical devices used: figurative language dominates in the former, and while the latter may also use metaphor, the type of metaphor most commonly found therein is the metonym.

1.1. According to the specific dominant ST function, a distinction is made between translation of an informative text, translation of a vocative text and translation of an expressive text. The purpose of an informative text is to provide information to readers;, that of a vocative text is to persuade readers to act in a certain way; and that of an expressive text is to allow readers an insight into the thought and style of a given author. Expressive texts are characterized by leitmotivs and figurative language and may be in the first person. Informative texts contain mainly theme words and factual language with conventional metaphors and sayings. Vocative texts often include token words and its language is compelling and may include original metaphors.¹¹

Pragmatic texts are generally informative or vocative; literary texts are primarily expressive.

1.2. According to the *degree of specialization* of the ST content and the SL vocabulary, a separation is made between general translation and specialized translation. A specialized text, in contrast to a general text, focusses heavily on a given field or fields and uses the vocabulary typical of that field. The general/specialized subclasses apply mainly to pragmatic (informative and vocative) texts.

1.3. According to the *general area of specialization* covered by the source texts, the subclasses sci-tech translation and socio-ecopolitical translation¹² are identified. These types match the basic subject classifications and therefore need no further development here.

Only specialized texts are categorized as scitech or socio-eco-political, since they focus more heavily on an area of specialization than do general texts. That does not mean, however, that general pragmatic texts, or literary texts for that matter, do not touch on sci-tech or socioeco-political issues.

1.4. According to the source text discourse style (or discourse structure), translations can be subdivided into description, argument, narration and dialogue. These four categories are described as follows by Nida and Revburn: «Narrative discourse consists in a series of temporarily related events and participants, descriptive discourse consists primarily in a series of spatially related characteristics of objects or events, argument consists in a series of logically related events, states, or circumstances, and dialogue consists essentially in a series of questions and answers or of statements and negations in which the related forms are highly conditioned by one another» (1981: 42).

This subclassification according to source text discourse style is applicable to all texts, pragmatic or literary (including the various subtypes of pragmatic texts. While it is obvious that the discourse style «dialogue» is more typical of literary texts than of pragmatic texts, it is nevertheless a characteristic of certain types of pragmatic texts (e.g. the *Hansard*).

1.5. According to the *source text genre*, all translations (both pragmatic or literary) can be



¹⁰ The confusion surrounding the term «pragmatic translation» is discussed by Peter Newmark (1991: 116). For the purposes of this paper, I have partially adopted the second sense he has proposed – «*pragmatic* can mean concened with immediate practicalities or expedience» – eliminating the negative connotations contained therein.

¹¹My distinction between informative, vocative and expressive texts is very similar to Newmark's (*cfr.* Newmark, 1981: 15, and 1988: 39-42).

¹² This is basically the subclass that Newmark has termed «institutional» and which he describes as covering the fields of culture, social sciences and commerce in one work (1991, p. 36) and politics, finance, commerce and government in another (1988, p. 151). However, the term does not indicate the areas of specialization, as does the designation of the coordinate subtype «sci-tech». Hence the change in designation.

classified into categories such as book, article, textbook, report, notice, law/regulation, letter, novel, essay, poem, play, etc. The subclasses identified in the typology are not exhaustive: other discourse genres such as memo, contract, etc. should be added to the list to complete it.

As indicated above, all the characteristics treated in this first typology pertain to the classification of translation on the basis of the source text. The second typology I prepared covers classification solely on the basis of the target text and the process of producing it. This classification is more complex, since, at the highest level, the translated text can be considered from four completely different points of view:

2. According to the general purpose of translating, the translations can be categorized as non-professional or professional. In the latter case, the translation is done for a customer at his request against financial remuneration, in the former it is done for personal reasons by the translator.

3. According to the *translation approach* used in producing the target text, translations can be categorized as semantic or communicative. Semantic translation is more writer-oriented and source-language-oriented; communicative trans lation is more reader-oriented and target-language-oriented.

4. According to the *medium of translation*, the translation can be characterized as oral translation or written translation. It should be noted that oral translation is taken here in the sense not only (nor even principally) of interpretation but of a translation done aloud for a customer or of dubbing or subtitling.

5. According to the *direction of translating*, the translation can be classified as being into the dominant language or out of the dominant language. These are often called «thème» and «version» in academic (i.e. non-professional) circles, but since translation into the dominant language and out of the dominant language is done not only in courses but also in the professional milieu, I prefer to use the descriptive designations «translation into the dominant language» and «translation out of the dominant language.

The four classifications noted above are not completely unrelated both non-professional and professional translation may be approached semantically or communicatively, may be in written or oral form and may be into or out of the dominant language. However, given that the characteristic upon which each classification is based is totally different, the four cannot be combined hierarchically. Each represents a separate dimension.

The categories of non-professional and professional translation, based on the characteristic of general purpose of translating (*cfr.* dimension 2 above), can be further subdivided as follows:

2.1. According to the *intended status* of the *translation* in relation to the original, translations can be classified as full equals of, full substitutes of, or alternatives to the original. A full equal translation, which has the highest status, is described by Sager as «a full equal with the original in all respects and may therefore serve as a basis for other translation» (1983: 123). A full substitute translation, which is an independent document serving as a full substitute for the monolingual reader, is next in status. An alternative translation, i.e. a translation that «is an alternative to the original and coexists with it» (Sager, 1983: 123), has the lowest status.

Only a professional translation can be a full equal, a full substitute or an alternative; although a non-professional translation can be prepared with one of these statuses in mind, it rarely acquires any status in actual fact.

2.2. According to the specific purpose of translating, non-professional translation can be broken down into academic translation (translation done in the framework of a course, often for language learning purposes) and translation for pleasure (which is sometimes, but rarely, done because of the «importance» of the source text involved). Professional translation on the other hand can be subdvided into translation for information and translation for publication. The term «publication» is used here in the sense of wide dissemination, whether in print or by other means; for example, dubbing and subtitling are considered «translation for publication», since they are intended for diffusion to a wide public. Translation for publication has more prestige than translation for information, which is produced for a restricted (and often well-defined) readership.



A full equal translation is normally a translation for publication, whereas a full substitute or an alternative may be a translation for information or a translation for publication.

2.3. According to the *«integrality of translation»*, i.e. the *«*amount*»* of the source text translated, both non-professional translation (aca-demic and for pleasure) and professional translation (for information and for publication) can be either full or selective. Selective translation co-vers not only translation of certain passages in a text but also abstracts or summaries prepared on the basis of a source text in another language.

2.4. According to the *communicative function* of the translation in relation to that of the source text, translations can be either same function translations or different function translations. In other words, a same function translation of a vocative source text would result in a vocative target text, whereas a different function translation of a vocative source text may result in an informative target text. While selective translation in the form of translation, selective translation in the form of the production of an abstract in another language is an example of different function.

2.5. According to the modifications required in the translation (other than those related to communicative function and detailed in 2.4 above), both full and selective translations can be considered to be without modification or with modification. The modifications referred to here do not include changes resulting from the «genius» of the target language; rather they include changes in style, focus or format. They could be explicitly requested by the translation customer or could be required by the nature of the text to be translated (e.g. legislation). However, they would not include modifications that the translator chose freely to introduce in the translation because of the translation approach adopted.

On the basis of translation approach, which constitutes a separate dimension in our classification (dimension 3), the categories of communicative translation and semantic translation have been identified above. These can be further subdivided as follows:

3.1. According to the *focus of the translator*, a translation can be writer-oriented or reader-

oriented. Communicative translation is more reader-oriented and semantic translation more writer-oriented.

3.2. According to the degree of modification introduced in the translation, it can be literal or free. Here the term «literal translation» refers not to a translation which is ungrammatical or unidiomatic because of the influence of the source text, but to a translation in which the modifications introduced are solely those required by the target language. A «free translation» is seen here as any translation which incorporates more changes than those strictly required by the target language. While a writeroriented translation will tend to be literal, a reader-oriented translation may be either literal or free, for a well-written source text may be translated literally and still have an equivalent effect on the reader of the translation.¹³

Generally, a translation involving a different function and other modifications is generally produced using a communicative approach, while a translation with the same function and without other required modifications may be produced using a semantic or a communicative approach, or a combination of the two. This link and others between the dimensions that are based on the target text and its production – dimensions 2 and 3 detailed above, as well as 4 and 5 which are not further developed here $-^{14}$ are still provisional at this stage and require more refinement.

Once the two typologies of translations were produced on the basis of two different focuses (source text vs. translation), they were integrated into one graph (cfr. Annex 2)¹⁵ for the

¹⁴ Dimensions 4 and 5 seem less important than 2 and 3 and are therefore not detailed here.

¹⁵ This graph was produced using a general purpose knowledge management tool called CODE, developed by Douglas Skuce *et al.* at the Artificial Intelligence Lab of the University of Ottawa. My thanks to Karen Eck, a graduate student, who prepared the graph.



¹³ Newmark (1981: 39) goes as far as to say: «...in communicative as in semantic translation, provided that equivalent-effect is secured, the literal word-for-word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation». Although I do not espouse this view totally, I do believe that communicative translation can be literal if the source text is well-written.

simple reason that, despite the difference in focus, they both serve as classifications of the same class of objects, translation. However, no attempt has been made in this preliminary effort to produce a comprehensive typology of translations to make direct links from one to the other. One could presume, for example, that most literary translations would have publication. rather than information, as their general purpose and would have the same function as the original. However, it seems premature at this stage, when the overall typology is still tentative, to generalize in terms of such links. But despite the lack of such details, the overall typology proposed has the merit of taking into consideration and attempting to put together in a coherent and logical form the many individual classifications of translations proposed by both translation scholars and translation professionals.

CONCLUSION

Such a comprehensive typology of translations has the advantage not only of classifying knowledge in the field – an advantage that may seem rather «abstract» to many – but also of serving as a basic tool in translation research, in translation teaching, and in the translation profession.

Translation scholars can use this typology to create a homogeneous corpus for study. While the selection of corpora using source text characteristics similar to those listed in dimension 1 is not new, this typology might help to suggest other criteria (for instance those found in dimension 2) which could be used instead of, or in addition to, the former.

Similarly, translation professors can use dimension 2 and its subcategories to propose a variety of translation exercises to their students. For instance, they can ask students to translate a text for information purposes, and then require them to rework it for publication. Or again, they might ask them to do a full translation for information purposes and then do a selective translation with the same function. Or they can base themselves on dimension 3 to encourage students to develop various translation approaches.

Finally, the typology proposed can be used in the professional milieu by translation customers,

translation administrators and translators themselves. Translation customers can use dimension 2 to indicate their requirements (e.g. the translation, which is to be a full substitute, is intended for publication, and must be a full translation with the same function and no other unnecessary modification). Translation administrators can use dimension 1 to assign the translation to an appropriate translator and dimension 2 to evaluate the completed translation. The translator can use dimension 3 to make and justify his translation choices. In other words, the typology proposed can serve to establish what Richard Simpkin has termed «translation specifications» (1983: 129-139), which would include both customer specifications and technical specifications.¹⁶ Properly established translation specifications would help the translator to better meet the customer's needs.

The practical advantages of a well-established typology of translation are thus clear. What remains to be done is to refine the proposed typology to the point where it can be used effectively.

¹⁶ Simpkin bases his concept of translation specifications on the fact that professional translation is an industrial product, which has to be related both to a target market as a whole and to a specific requirement within that market. According to Simpkin, a specification has three purposes: to provide the basis on which a contract can be struck; to enable the product to be manufactured in accordance with the purchaser's requirement or expectations; and to provide a means of ensuring that the product does in fact comply with the specific stipulations of the contact specification and with any obligatory or voluntary general provisions which may apply.



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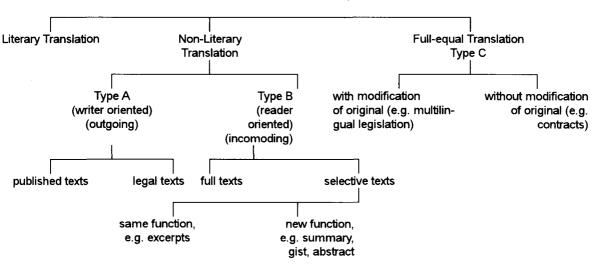
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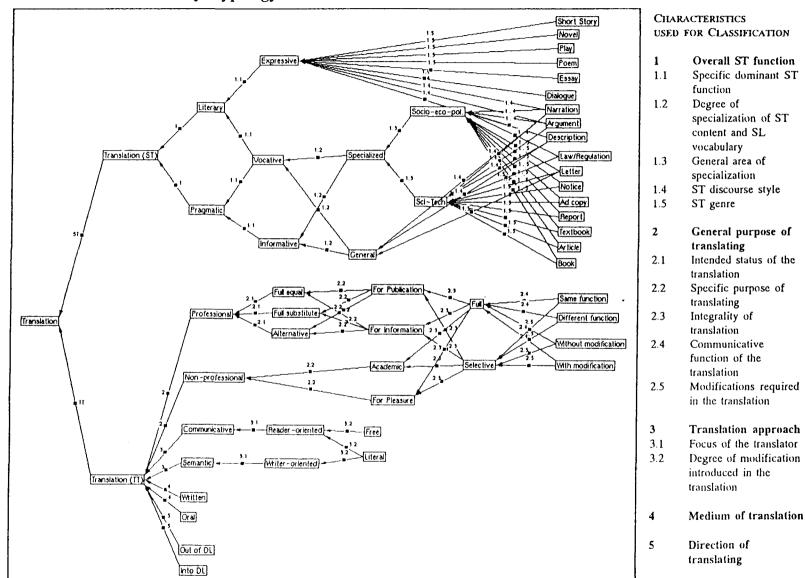
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ANNEX 1: J. C. SAGER'S CLASSIFICATION OF TRANSLATIONS



Mediation + Translation types





Annex 2: A Preliminary Typology of Translations

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