TRANSLATING TERMS OF AFFECTION AND ABUSE FROM GERMAN TO ENGLISH
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ANIMAL METAPHORS

INGOLA CONZE

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg 1986
ABSTRACT

This project examines the difficulties in translating expressions of affection and abuse from German to English. Most of these expressions are of idiomatic and metaphoric origin. Expressions have been selected from everyday family situations as well as from a variety of popular literature and allegoric dictionaries. The project examines the cultural origins of animal metaphors, and, where possible, it traces their evolution before they took on the forms as we know them today.

Theoretical research is based primarily on House’s theory for assessing translations and Reiss’s theory on recoding where there are no suitable equivalents in the target language. A discussion on selected grammatical and cultural peculiarities and similarities between German and English precedes a selected glossary, with suitable equivalents constituting the final part of this project.

It was concluded that the translator’s native ability to speak both the target language and the source language is the most essential prerequisite for translating expressions of this nature.
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Ingola Conze

INGOLA CONZE

Sixteenth day of March, 1987.
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Ingola Conze

INGOLA CONZE

Sixteenth day of March, 1987.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Oakshott Taylor, as well as Dr. Peter Hurst and Prof. Masing-Delic for their assistance and ready advice during the course of this dissertation. My thanks also go to Nigel Kemper for typing the dissertation.
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Objectives</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methods</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Theoretical Aspect</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common problem areas in translation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Problems with cross-cultural differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The difficulty in achieving perfect translation equivalence</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The language aspect</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Common usage versus idiolect</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) The translator and the translation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Empirical Aspect</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) The contemporary use of terms of affection and abuse</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Metaphors and idioms based on animals in German and English</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Grammatical similarities and differences</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Epithets</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) The use of the common noun as a term of address</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Plays on sound and rhyme</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
d) The use of diminutives

e) Affective versus literal meaning

f) Animal categories not used commonly to describe people and their habits

C. Annotated glossary

a. Pets
i) Huhn
ii) Hund
iii) Katze
iv) Kröte
v) Maus
vi) Vögelchen

b. Farm animals
i) Ente
ii) Gans
iii) Hahn
iv) Kuh
v) Pferd
vi) Schaf
vii) Schwein
viii) Ziege

c. Beasts of burden
i) Elefant
ii) Esel
iii) Kamel

d. Wild animals
i) Affe
ii) Bär
iii) Büffel
iv) Fuchs
v) Hirsch
vi) Igel
vii) Löwe
viii) Luchs
ix) Nilpferd
x) Ruh
xi) Rhinozeros
xii) Schlange
xiii) Tiger

e. Pests
i) Biene
ii) Fliege
iii) Floh
iv) Käfer
v) Laus
vi) Motte
vii) Ratte

4. Conclusion

5. Bibliography
1. Introduction

The central purpose of this project is to examine the translation of terms of affection and abuse from German to English with special reference to animal metaphors. Expressions of this nature occur in every language and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to find suitable equivalents across language barriers. Often two different languages do not have word for word equivalents for expressions, be they proverbs, similes, metaphors, idioms or puns, and the translator has to face the ever present divergence of linguistic and semantic structures. For instance, in both German (SL - source language) and English (TL - target language) there is an expression implying that a person is stupid: "Du blöde Kuh!" and "You stupid (old) cow!", but "Du blöder Hund!" cannot be translated satisfactorily as "You stupid dog!". The difficulty evidently lies in translating the expression by an optimal equivalent (Reiss 1977:11) ensuring that the intended meaning is not lost.

The mistranslation of such expressions, and the substitution of inadequate equivalents could lead to a loss in meaning which will distort the intention of the message to be conveyed. Meaning must be successfully translated from one language ". . . into the terms of another" (Pinchuck 1977:30). According to House, meaning must be translated by
using a semantic and pragmatic equivalent in the target language. How could the very colloquial term of affection, frequently used in German, "Mäuschen" be translated successfully into English? "Little mouse" would not do, as the expression used out of context only has a literal meaning in English. Here we are also faced by the glaring difference between the literal and the intended meaning of the expression, with the former signifying a small mouse and the latter expressing an affectionate emotion. What is in fact meant by the expression only becomes clear in relation to the context in which it is used. In this case the term would have to be "recoded" (umkodiert) according to Reiss's theory on recoding (Reiss 1976:101, 119; 1971:81). Reiss's theory will be applied to the examples given throughout this project as it is one of few methods of successfully retaining the intended meanings and nuances which these would otherwise be lost.

Complimentary and derogatory expressions are used by most people in their daily speech, irrespective of which language they are speaking. These terms are used in a countless variety of situations and contexts to express a wide range of emotions at given times. They appear to be bound to particular situations, because people from different milieux use different expressions to describe how they feel and especially how they feel about others. This point is illustrated very well, although in a slightly different
context, in an article by Albrecht (1971:11). Albrecht discusses how person to person greetings and addresses vary according to the situation, i.e. whether somebody is addressed as Mister, Sir, Your Honour, Your Majesty, Your Highness, Madam, Miss, Lady, hey you! etc. Albrecht attempts to show how addresses depend on the formality or informality of an occasion, on the type of relationship which exists between the addresser and the addressee e.g. boss/secretary, judge/defendant, servant/employer, pupil/teacher, stranger/stranger or equal/equal. Although he does not deal directly with terms of affection and abuse, what he says about addressers, depending on the occasion or situation, holds true for the terms with which this project is concerned. Albrecht substantiates House's theory of "Situationsbezogenheit", and Reiss's postulation that words must be chosen for translation purposes only if they are "Situationsadequat", by examining the words and phrases employed by certain individuals, and seeing how these expressions vary according to the situation at hand. (cf. Weinrich in Reiss 1971:70 - "Wörter gehören in Sätze, Texte und Situationen"). Notably the expressions also vary from one country to another, (even if the official language of the country is the same e.g. Britain, Australia, the United States and South Africa) as well as from one culture to another. Similarly given situations determine whether the expressions employed originate from an elitist, intellectual background or from one displaying
a lack of education, manners and etiquette. The eight dimensions constituting the backbone of House's model (1977) provide an appropriate guideline in terms of which these expressions may be analysed.

Research on terms of affection and abuse is by no means limited to a purely linguistic level, as the origin of most terms can be traced back into the past. Historical, cultural and traditional aspects, which form the basis of verbal communication, are manifested in language and therefore play a prominent role which cannot be ignored (Albrecht 1973:11). Through the centuries, cultural patterns and perceptions stemming from customs and beliefs have had a bearing on the evolution of semantics as a whole, and the terms examined in this project will be placed within this anthropological context.

For as far back as there are records available, man has been compared to animals. It is a means of describing individual who display particular characteristics typical of those displayed by certain animals. Comparing people to animals is simply a way of expressing the similarity of two concepts, ("die Ähnlichkeit zweier Begriffe"). (Hentschel in Berg 1978:100).

Unfortunately the limited space allotted to this project only permits an in depth examination of expressions based on five selected animal categories, namely pets, farm
animals, beasts of burden, pests and game, but this should suffice to outline the difficulties and problems experienced in translating terms of affection and abuse.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this project are as follows:

(1) To examine and define the difficulties in translating terms of affection and abuse from German to English.

(2) To determine the problems and possible solutions where there are no suitable equivalents.

(3) To investigate in which situations these expressions are employed and by whom.

(4) To approach the theme of this project from an anthropological aspect.

(5) To discuss the frequency of occurrence and the importance of diminutives in English as opposed to German.

(6) To look at some interesting grammatical peculiarities arising when translating these expressions.

(7) To compile an annotated glossary of five selected animal categories with English equivalents.
3. Methods

The theoretical aspect of this project is based primarily on an adaptation of the theory proposed by House. Further assistance was obtained by occasional reference to Reiss's theory on "recoding".

The empirical aspect of this project is based on:

1) the collection of conventional and non-conventional terms of affection and abuse used by different people in various situations e.g. parents to their children, television personalities, radio disc-jockeys, members of a family and friends etc. The majority of examples were taken from standard German speakers, but some were taken from Germans who have lived in South Africa for twenty years or more, and who may have been influenced by English or Afrikaans. Only the most common expressions were recorded and translated. This was done on the basis of the author's own intuition as a native speaker of both German and English.

2) the collection of terms such as those which appear in a selection of popular literature e.g. "Bunte", a German equivalent of the "Fair Lady" magazine, and translations of Steinbeck (1960) and Buck (1956).

3) the examination of the anthropological background of certain expressions with the aid of bilingual and
monolingual dictionaries, etymological dictionaries, dictionaries of folklore, fairy tales, books on ancient mythology, books on animal allegories and dictionaries of verbal abuse.

4) the compilation of an annotated glossary of five selected animal categories with English equivalents where possible.
A. Theoretical Aspect

Common problem areas in translation

Perhaps the most difficult, yet the most essential aspect of translation, is rendering meaning accurately across language barriers. House drafted a model based on the ideas of Crystal and Davy (1969) and Halliday (1964) to assess the quality of a translation. House's model is not primarily designed to deal with randomly selected phrases, but owing to the dynamic nature of the model, it lends itself exceptionally well to assessing the translations of out-of-context verbal phrases.

For the purpose of this project, however, House's model will, strictly speaking, not be used so much to assess the quality of an already translated term, as to assist in the actual translating of the term, i.e. the function of the model will be somewhat adapted to suit the objectives of this project. German terms will be translated in close adherence to the eight dimensions distinguished by House, thereby aiming to achieve a duplicate version of the ST, only in another language, with as few mismatches as possible.

A good translation has been defined as "one which fulfills the same purpose in the new language as the original did."
House (1977:25) herself defines it as "the preservation of meaning across two different languages." Catford (1965:67) defines a good translation as one where an utterance serves the same function in one language as in the other. This corresponds to a suggestion put forward by Miller and Beebe-Center (1958 in House 1977:17), who claim that if people can physically respond to either source or target language instructions, and if the results are similar across all respondents, then the original and its translation must be equivalent and therefore good.

The essence of any text is its function and House's model provides a supposed frame of reference for establishing this function. According to Bühler (1965 in Reiss 1976:26), the function of every text is to express thought, emotion and desire, otherwise known as "Darstellungsfunktion", "Ausdrucksfunktion" and "Appellfunktion". The Darstellungsfunktion of a text is its propositional content, the Ausdrucksfunktion expresses the emotions of the speaker and the Appellfunktion signifies the intended effect of the addressee on the addressee. The function of a text, or of an utterance, is also its effect in a given situation, and in order to determine its function it must be analysed in terms of the situation in which it is being employed or intended to be employed. The accurate use of House's dimensional guide-lines should therefore prevent...
the translator from losing sight of the precise function of any term.

House's model is divided into two main sections (A and B) which are further subdivided into eight dimensions:

A - Dimensions of the language user:
- geographical origin
- social class
- time

B - Dimensions of language use:
- medium
- participation
- social role relationship
- social attitude
- province

In order to apply the model to the terms which this project is concerned with, it must be explained that the subsections of A apply more to the person who is uttering the term than to the person to whom it is being uttered. Thus the term "Du Schwein!" presumably has its origin in Germany or even Austria or Switzerland. It may be considered as standard i.e. that which others conform to, or unmarked and must therefore be translated as "You pig!" - a standard unmarked English equivalent. A person from the northern part of Germany would readily use "Mäuschen" as a term of affection, but under the same circumstances a person from