

## Analysing the Source Text: A First Step for a Successful Translation

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**Abstract:** The translation of pragmatic texts requires many skills, among which that of analysing the source text to be translated. The present paper proposes the functional analysis as a helpful approach for training translation and interpreting students into such skills. It focuses on register analysis, paying attention to field, mode and tenor, and puts forward several activities meant to develop and improve student's abilities in understanding their texts as a first step in obtaining successful translations.

**Keywords:** source text analysis; register analysis; genre; field; mode; tenor; translation

### 1. The importance of source text analysis in translation

The process of translation requires many skills, since “[a]lmost every aspect of life in general and of the interaction between speech communities in particular can be considered relevant to translation” (Baker, 1992: 4). One of the most important is the understanding of the text to be translated. Translators need “above all, to acquire a sound knowledge of the raw material with which they work: to understand what language is and how it comes to function for its users” (ibid: 4). In other words, they have to understand the source texts, in terms of vocabulary, structure, style, genre, situational and cultural contexts, in order to provide adequate translations. As such, their analysing skills are to be trained and improved over the years, starting with their university training. The classes on translation are required to develop their ability to analyse the source texts and translate them according to their characteristics.

The present paper focuses on functional analysis as a possible approach to the analysis of source texts. It describes the register framework proposed by Halliday (1978, 1994), paying attention to its main aspects, namely field, mode and tenor.

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Then, it proposes several activities to be done with students in their Translation and interpreting classes in order to raise their awareness of the importance of understanding the source texts for the success of the translation and develop their required skills.

## **2. Functional analysis**

A functional model of language has been brought forth by the work of one of the most important linguists of modern times, namely Michael Halliday (1978, 1994), who considers language as a resource of making meaning by means of which people continuously and interactively shape and interpret the world. The network of linguistic choices people make is influenced by the context of communication and vice versa. This relation is dynamic and may change during the linguistic act. While performing a linguistic act, people usually have expectations related to its purpose, the topic to be discussed, the nature of the relationship between interactants and the channel of communication (Derewianka & Jones, 2016), which help them predict their linguistic choices. The contexts of culture and of situation determine, then, how and what people choose to use while communicating. These can be observed through genre and register analyses.

### **2.1. Genre**

The context of culture is related to language and observable in its particular choices. As stated by Eggins (2004: 20) “[t]he concept of genre is used to describe the impact of the context of culture on language, by exploring the staged, step-by-step structure cultures institutionalize as ways of achieving goals”. Cultures are to be understood as “collection of discourse communities, subcultures, or social institutions such as sporting groups, theatre aficionados, book clubs, friends, and family” (Derewianka & Jones, 2016: 7).

Genres or text types are “goal-oriented social practices” (Derewianka & Jones, 2016: 10) that evolve over time according to their use and enable people to get things done and achieve various social purposes, like for example getting a job, using a phone, persuading friends to go on a trip, instructing someone how to follow a recipe, completing tax forms or counselling. The term is broad and includes many types of genres (spoken, written and/or multimedia), namely

- literary genres, such as fables, short stories, autobiographies, ballads, sonnets, tragedies,
- popular fiction genres, like romantic novels, whodunits, sitcoms,
- educational genres, e.g. lectures, tutorials, report/essay writing, leading seminars, examinations, text-book writing,
- popular non-fiction genres, such as instructional manuals, news stories, profiles, reviews recipes, how-to features, and

- everyday genres, like transactional genres, seeking and supplying information, telling stories, gossiping, making appointments, going to interviews or chatting with friends (Eggins, 2004: 56).

No matter the type of text, each follows a characteristic structure based on particularly ordered stages, such as introduction, main body and conclusion, in order to achieve its purpose. These stages include, in turn, their own smaller phases that bring details and creativity to the text. Teaching students different genres and their particular structures enables them to understand better the texts and predict their features. In terms of translation, students will be better prepared in knowing the words and structures expected for that particular genre.

## **2.2. Register**

As genres are encoded in language, the process of realising them “is mediated through the realization of register” (Eggins 2004: 35). While genre is related to the context of culture, register refers to the context of situation and the language choices made in response to that particular situation. Register theory describes texts as having a variety of functions simultaneously, since they are always about something, but they can orient themselves to the readers in particular ways and they can organise their information depending on the medium selected or the contexts in which they occur (Eggins 2004, Stoian 2020).

Systemic Functional Linguistics proposes three dimensions of the immediate context of situation of a certain language event that have significant and predictable impacts on the way language is used. These are

- mode – the role language is playing in the interaction,
- tenor – the role relationships between the interactants, and
- field – what the language is being used to talk about, i.e. the topic or focus of the activity (Eggins 2004, Halliday 1978, 1994).

They are useful to understand the differences between written and spoken modes, between formal and informal registers and between the field of linguistics or that of cars. For example, a recipe (genre) will focus on cooking, namely ingredients, tools and instructions for the process of preparing food (field) in a written, prepared, often read as part of process of cooking manner (mode) from the perspective of the expert guiding a learner (tenor).

### **2.2.1. Mode**

Mode refers to the channel of communication used, namely oral, written and/or visual. It is concerned with the difference between spoken and written situations of language use. Figure 1 presents the typical situations of language use and points out their characteristics.

MODE: TYPICAL SITUATIONS OF LANGUAGE USE	
SPOKEN DISCOURSE	WRITTEN TEXT
+ interactive	non-interactive
2 or more participants	one participant
+ face-to-face	not face-to-face
in the same place at the same time	on her own
+ language as action	not language as action
using language to accomplish some task	using language to reflect
+ spontaneous	not spontaneous
without rehearsing what is going to be said	planning, drafting and rewriting
+ casual	not casual
informal and everyday	formal and special occasions

Figure 1: The typical situations of language use (mode) (Eggins, 2004: 92)

Each of the two modes use language differently and this is seen in their particular linguistic choices. Figure 2 indicates the implications mode has on language.

SPOKEN and WRITTEN LANGUAGE the linguistic implications of MODE	
SPOKEN LANGUAGE	WRITTEN LANGUAGE
turn-taking organization	monologic organization
context-dependent	context independent
dynamic structure	synoptic structure
–interactive staging	–rhetorical staging
–open-ended	–closed, finite
spontaneity phenomena (false starts, hesitations, interruptions, overlap, incomplete clauses)	'final draft' (polished) indications of earlier drafts removed
everyday lexis	'prestige' lexis
non-standard grammar	standard grammar
grammatical complexity	grammatical simplicity
lexically sparse	lexically dense

Figure 2: The linguistic implications of mode (Eggins, 2004: 93)

Making students aware of the characteristics of spoken and written language helps them predict each mode and create better texts and translations.

### 2.2.2. Tenor

This variable is concerned with the existing roles of the interlocutors and the relationships between them. Linguistic choices depend on factors such as interlocutors' status, level of expertise, age, ethnic background, and gender. The basis difference in the case of tenor is informal vs. formal situations, as indicated in Figure 3.

TENOR: typical situations of language use	
INFORMAL	FORMAL
equal power	unequal, hierarchic power
frequent contact	infrequent, or one-off contact
high affective involvement	low affective involvement

Figure 3: The typical situations of language use (tenor) (Eggsins, 2004: 101)

The linguistic choices expected by the formality or lack of formality of language are enumerated in detail in Figure 4.

FORMAL and INFORMAL LANGUAGE: the linguistic consequences of TENOR	
INFORMAL language	FORMAL language
attitudinal lexis (purr and snarl words)	neutral lexis
colloquial lexis – abbreviated forms – slang	formal lexis – full forms – no slang politeness phenomena (Ps and Qs) – no swearing
swearing	careful turn-taking
interruptions, overlap	titles, no names
first names	
nicknames	
diminutives	
typical mood choices	incongruent mood choices
modalization to express probability	modalization to express deference
modulation to express opinion	modulation to express suggestion

Figure 4: The linguistic implications of tenor (Eggsins, 2004: 103)

Knowing the differences between formal and informal contexts of situation and the implications they may have on language helps students in planning their discourses and translations accordingly.

### 2.2.3. Field

The third variable, field, refers to the focus of the activity accompanied by language, i.e. the content or subject matter. The possible situations are classified into technical and everyday ones, as can be seen in Figure 5.

TECHNICAL situation	EVERYDAY situation
assumed knowledge of an activity/ institution/area	'common knowledge' no (or little) assumed knowledge
deep taxonomies – detailed sub-classification	shallow taxonomies – limited sub-classification

Figure 5: The typical situations of language use (field) (Eggsins, 2004: 109)

A text about ancient history contains different terms than one about weekend activities due to the linguistic implications such situations have on the language people use, as pointed out in Figure. 6.

Technical and Everyday Language: the linguistic implications of FIELD	
TECHNICAL language	EVERYDAY language
technical terms	everyday terms
– words only 'insiders' understand	– words we all understand
acronyms	full names
abbreviated syntax	standard syntax
technical action processes	identifying processes (defining terms)
attributive (descriptive) processes	

Figure 6: The linguistic implications of field (Eggins, 2004: 110)

Identifying the topic of the text helps students predict its type of language and use the appropriate vocabulary in their texts and translations.

To summarize, register analysis indicates the mode, tenor and field of a particular text type or genre. Identifying these variables enables students to predict the required language and to act accordingly. For example, a text about a family (tenor) discussing (oral mode) their weekend holidays (field) is different from one about a client (tenor) complaining through an email (written mode) about the phone bought (field). The language choices in these cases are not the same, neither in the source nor in the target texts. The present paper introduces several activities to do in class with translation and interpreting students in order to raise their awareness of different texts, develop their skills in analysing texts and helping them in producing adequate and successful translations.

### 3. Analysing pragmatic source texts from a functional perspective

The activities focuses on non-literary texts as these are the ones related to the context of situation. As pointed out previously, the array of texts is very various, ranging from community texts, e.g. casual conversation, doctor consultations, shopping lists, texts used in educational contexts, such as book reviews, classroom interaction, laboratory reports, and at work, like business reports, office memos or safety warnings, to media texts, such as editorials, news bulletins, television documentaries (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). This diversity requires many skills from the translator in order to cope with particular situations. Texts cannot be translated adequately and appropriately if the translator does not consider the situation in which they are produced and for which they are translated.

In order to raise students' awareness, they are first presented with several types of texts. Then, they are introduced to genre analysis and register theory. In the end, they have to apply the theory in class on a particular text type. Then, they receive a follow-up activity so that they practice the knowledge and skills acquired.

### 3.1. Examples of pragmatic texts

To start with, students are shown several types of pragmatic texts that serve practical and immediate communicative purposes. They need to identify the types by themselves and argue their choices, based on the genre, topic, communication channel and interlocutors found. The correct answer is revealed to the students after each example.

Different text types can be presented to the class for the sake of exemplification and diversity awareness. The ones chosen for this activity are as follows:

- *newspaper article*



Figure 7: Example of newspaper article (The Guardian, 2022)

- *product advertisement*  
A magical new way to interact with iPhone. Groundbreaking safety features designed to save lives. An innovative 48MP camera for mind-blowing detail. All powered by the ultimate smartphone chip. (Apple, 2022)
- *tourist website*

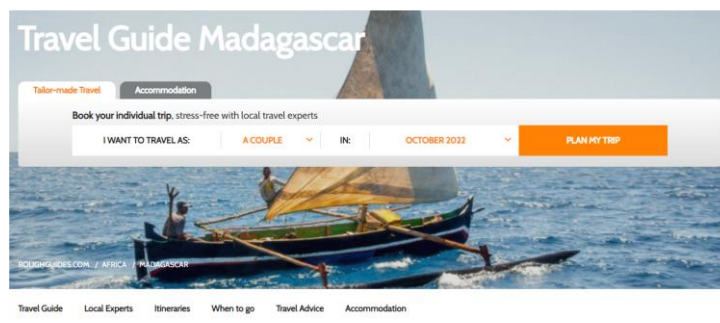


Figure 8: Example of tourist website (Rough Guides, 2022)

- *recipe*
  1. Preheat the oven to 170C/325F/Gas 3. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside.
  2. Put a small frying pan on a medium heat for the pancetta.
  3. Then, put the butter and milk in a medium pan over a low heat and leave the butter to melt.
  4. Meanwhile, tip the pancetta into the frying pan with a drizzle of oil and cook for about four minutes, tossing every so often.
  5. Once the butter has melted into the milk, whack up the heat and bring to the boil. (excerpt from BBC, 2022)
  
- *user manual*
  1. Programme selector dial  
Choose the appropriate wash programme as required, depending on the degree of soil, and type and amount of laundry loaded, which ensures better results and more effective washing. Once the cleaning programme is started, turning the programme selector knob to another position is indicated by an acoustic signal however it does not change the previously selected programme (excerpt from Amica, 2022)
  
- *novel*  
This discourtesy went beyond all limits. Alice rose upset from the chair and left; the hamster immediately fell asleep and none of the other two seemed to mind her leaving, although she turned her head around several times, with the hope that they will call her back. As she moved away, Alice saw how the two were trying to poke the hamster into the teapot (excerpt from Carroll, 1865).

The last example is a literary text and not a pragmatic one. This wrong example is shown to the students on purpose in order to see whether they have paid attention and have understood the difference between genres.

### **3.2. Functional analysis**

After being presented with various types of pragmatic texts, the attention is directed to one in particular for analysis reasons. The first analysis focuses on genre as each genre has a predictable pattern of development and is directly related to the variables of register.

#### **3.2.1. Genre analysis**

A text type already presented in the previous activity is chosen for exemplification, namely the recipe. Students receive the following recipe:



### Spinach Risotto

This traditional dish of Greek-Cypriot origin offers an economical but substantial vegetarian meal.

3 tablespoons olive oil

2 onions, chopped

1-2 bunches silver beet or English spinach

1 375 gr tin peeled tomatoes

2 tablespoons tomato paste

1 cup water

1 cup risotto rice

white wine (optional)

salt and pepper

Slice the dead ends off the spinach. Slice stalks off from leaves. Wash stalks and leaves. Slice stalks finely, and shred leaves.

In a large saucepan, heat the oil. Fry the onions till soft. Add the stalks and fry till soft. Add the shredded leaves and cook for several minutes. Then add the tomatoes and tomato paste. Turn low and cook for about 10 mins. Add water, wine, salt and pepper, and the rice. Cook until the rice has absorbed the liquid (10-15 mins).

Serve with Greek salad and crusty wholemeal bread.

Serves 4 (Eggins, 2004: 66-67).

Then, they are asked to consider its possible stages. The answer is afterwards discussed with the students, as indicated in Figure 9.

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<i>Title</i>	Spinach Risotto	This stage names of the dish to be prepared and differentiates individual recipes from each other.
<i>Enticement</i>	This traditional dish of Greek-Cypriot origin offers an economical but substantial vegetarian meal.	This stage indicates the reasons to cook this recipe.
<i>Ingredients</i>	3 tablespoons olive oil 2 onions, chopped 1-2 bunches silver beet or English spinach 1 375 gr tin peeled tomatoes 2 tablespoons tomato paste 1 cup water 1 cup risotto rice white wine (optional) salt and pepper	This stage provides the reader with what is needed to cook the recipe.
<i>Method</i>	Slice the dead ends off the spinach. Slice	This stage actually indicates

	stalks off from leaves. Wash stalks and leaves. Slice stalks finely, and shred leaves. In a large saucepan, heat the oil. Fry the onions till soft. Add the stalks and fry till soft. Add the shredded leaves and cook for several minutes. Then add the tomatoes and tomato paste. Turn low and cook for about 10 mins. Add water, wine, salt and pepper, and the rice. Cook until the rice has absorbed the liquid (10-15 mins). Serve with Greek salad and crusty wholemeal bread.	how to make the dish.
<i>Serving Quantity</i>	Serves 4	This final stage informs for how many persons is the dish.

Figure 9: Example of genre analysis (adapted from Eggins, 2004)

The schematic structure is thus Title, Enticement, Ingredients, Method and Serving Quantity. Some stages may not be present in all the recipes, e.g. Serving Quantity. Other recipes have visual stages, such as pictures and/or videos. The stages can be further classified in different phases.

As a follow up activity, the students receive another recipe to work on at home based on the activity carried out in class.

### 3.2.2. Register analysis

After presenting students with various genres and the way they are constructed and analysed, the next step is to look at a text and observe its register variables and how they are expressed by particular linguistic choices.

The following text has been chosen for the analysis:

- A. Now, should I give the meat another quarter of an hour before we put the potatoes and stuff in?
- B. How long's it had?
- A. Had about .. must've had about quarter of an hour
- B. Oh.. The potatoes don't need to be in for more than, for much more than an hour, do they?
- A. No, so if we leave it say leave it say for another half hour, then.. oh dear
- B. You've planned about two hours of cooking haven't you?
- A. Yeah Umm
- B. So another half hour will give the potatoes an hour and a quarter
- A. No an hour
- B. To be safe uha
- A. It'll give them an hour. Right.
- B. And the parsnips maybe earlier cos they're harder
- A. No no They won't cook they won't cook fa They certainly won't cook faster than the potatoes even

- B. No I'd've said slower  
 A. Sorry, what I mean is they it takes them not very long  
 B. uha despite their hardness  
 A. despite their ...??  
 B. Right now let's see. ... has she? has she taken the cork out?  
 (Laughter)  
 A. Taken the cork? No no (Laughter) ... she's ..taken the top  
 B. No, no she's .. an on-going ...conceptual disagreement Huh  
 A. Oh yes? should I take this out? I don't.  
 B. The first instructions I ever read of Delia's said take the cork out (laughter) so I've obediently done it ever since  
 A. Never having read it, I don't do it, and it tastes just as good the same (transcript from Stoian, 2022).

Students are asked to compare this text with a recipe and indicate similarities and differences. The field is the same (cooking), but the tenor (2 friends, family members or acquaintances) and mode (dialogue) are different. Being introduced to the concepts of register and how they influence language, students are lead through a register analysis of the text.

For each variable, they receive a grid with several indications (see Figures 10, 12 and 14) and then a possible analysis (see Figures 11, 13 and 15).

variable	Context of production	Linguistic features of text
MODE	Physical distance between producer and receiver of text is....  Language is used to make possible a social activity:	<b>Dialogue:</b>  <b>context dependent:</b>  <b>Spontaneous:</b>  <b>everyday lexis:</b>  <b>grammar of speech:</b>  Spoken signals of change of topic:

Figure 10: Grid for analysing mode

variable	Context of production	Linguistic features of text
MODE	Physical distance between producer and receiver of text is minimum: face-to-face  Language is used to make possible a social activity: cooking	<b>Dialogue:</b> turn-taking <b>context dependent:</b> <i>I/we</i> , and she <i>has she...?</i> referring a third person present but less involved in the activity of cooking <b>spontaneous:</b> laughter, repetitions, incomplete utterances, ellipsis, corrections: yeah, umm, uha <b>everyday lexis:</b> potatoes etc <b>grammar of speech:</b> noun phrases: light, usually Det+H: the meat, the potatoes, vague words: <i>and stuff</i> Spoken signals of change of topic: <i>Right now let's see.</i>

Figure 11: Mode analysis

variable	Context of production	Linguistic features of text
TENOR	<u>Power:</u>  <u>Contact:</u>  <u>Distance:</u>	

Figure 12: Grid for analysing tenor

variable	Context of production	Linguistic features of text
TENOR	<u>Power:</u> equal (almost)  <u>Contact:</u> probably frequent  <u>Distance:</u> close	A lot of <b>negotiation:</b> • questions, tags, conditionals to make suggestions, politeness: <i>Sorry what I mean is...</i> • giving in: <i>uha despite their hardness</i> Some power shown: direct negation <i>No, an hour.</i> Evaluation- <i>tastes just as good</i> Informal phrases No vocatives

Figure 13: Tenor analysis

variable	Context of production	Linguistic features of text
FIELD	Language as action:  Knowledge:	Lexical sets

Figure 14: Grid for analysing field

variable	Context of production	Linguistic features of text
FIELD	Language as action: activity of cooking- two people are getting a meal  Knowledge: of cooking, of tv cooks (cultural ref)	Lexical sets <b>Nouns re food (+ drink)-</b> <i>meat, potatoes, parsnips, cork</i> <b>Verbs:</b> <i>give/ have/ leave (+ period of time) plan, cook x 3, take out read, said</i> <b>Circs time-</b> + advs of manner and time- <i>faster, slower, (not very) long etc.</i>

Figure 15: Field analysis

After analysing the text from a register perspective, students are asked to think about the interpretation of the analysis. The following possible interpretation is provided by the teacher:

The speakers (A and B) are talking as they carry out the activity of cooking together, though A is in charge. The situation is informal, and the speakers seem to be close and relaxed, though they are polite. There is a lot of negotiation over the cooking, though when there is a disagreement, B gives in, while A makes more categorical statements, showing power. A also evaluates. It seems that the conversation is not only about cooking but also about the relations between the speakers. The language of cooking is not at all technical, so the conversation is very accessible. There is one cultural reference, to a TV chef which the speakers refer to by her first name, showing they share knowledge of the referent, and the relevance to the conversation.

A follow up activity may include a portfolio of several texts from different areas that the students could analyse, interpret and compare based on the genre and register analyses performed in class. They start from the grids provided and make one for each text. The task could be performed in groups and for several weeks as a term project.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The present paper has focused on the importance of source texts for successful translations. Translation students need to be trained into analysing their source texts paying attention to the contexts of culture and situation in which they are produced in order to render the same meaning and provide translations appropriate to the source contexts. The activities suggested raise their awareness on different types of pragmatic texts, genre and register analyses. Together with the follow up activities, they are meant to develop their analysing skills.

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