

# Introduction

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The relationship of translation, interpretation and meaning is hermeneutic in nature: translation originates from the understanding and interpretation of the source text meaning, which is recreated in the target text by the translator. This process often involves actualising or appropriating the text into new circumstances and new cultures, modifying the contents, or re-interpreting the meaning for ideological reasons.

The attitudes of translators towards their texts and the practices they have adopted in translating, however, have varied from one historical period to another and between different types of texts. At the one end of the spectrum, illustrated by several studies in the present volume, are the ancient translations of biblical texts – the earliest surviving translations of longer texts. Most of these translations reflect attitudes of great reverence for the exact wording of the original, which was regarded as authoritative and sacred. Each and every element of the text was considered to be worthy of translation. Nevertheless, even these early translators did occasionally, without reflecting theoretically on their task, reach beyond the elementary level of word-for-word level of interpretation.

A very different approach to translating can be observed in those medieval translations that were made for the practical purpose of mediating scientific knowledge, mainly available in Latin, disseminating this knowledge in the vernacular language for the benefit of non-Latinate, non-learned audiences. A good example of this process is seen in medical texts that were produced in medieval England. These translations, for which the original source texts are often not preserved, did not have to be reproduced verbatim for reasons of sacredness, and thus, the translators often seem to have concentrated on the interpretation of the actual content of the original rather than on a word-for-word translation. Such texts could also be excerpted according to the needs of the target-text recipients.

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These different orientations to the relationship of translation, interpretation and meaning are illustrated in the content of this volume, based on the papers presented in the international interdisciplinary symposium, Translation – Interpretation – Meaning, arranged at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies in January 2005. The incentive for the symposium came from the editors' shared interest in the role of interpretation in early translations, specifically ancient Greek biblical translations and medieval English medical translations. However, the symposium provided an opportunity to examine the hermeneutic relationship of the key concepts from a wider range of perspectives by bringing together international experts from a number of relevant disciplines, including theology, philosophy, philology, linguistics and translation studies. The participants' areas of special interest included translations of biblical, philosophical, medical and literary texts, hermeneutics, historical semantics, semiotics and translation theory. Methodological concerns had a crucial role in the symposium, and they are reflected in the selection of papers presented in this volume. The studies address and shed light on issues such as how to recognise and describe interpretative elements in early translations and how to analyse the influence of text-external factors.

The volume begins with studies focusing on religious translations. Four papers investigate translation, interpretation and meaning in the Septuagint, the early Jewish Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures – the “mother of all Bible translations”. The first article by Anneli Aejmelaeus traces the trail of Septuagint translators in search of the criteria to distinguish between the different levels of interpretation in their work. In a closely related paper, Theo van der Louw examines the nature of interpretation in the transformations or ‘shifts’ witnessed in the Septuagint, i.e. the micro-level semantic changes that occur in the transfer from one language to another, which may stem not only from ideological but also from linguistic reasons. Raija Sollamo's study focuses on the Septuagint translators' contextual interpretation of the polysemous Hebrew semipreposition לְפָנָי. Jan Joosten's paper offers insight into the combination of explanation and quotation in the Septuagint, with both translation techniques aiming to preserve the propositional and pragmatic meanings of the original in a new cultural context. The final paper of this section, shifting the focus to the texts of the New Testament, is by Christiane Nord, who analyses the receiver-oriented communicative functions of pericope titles, introduced by the later editors and translators of the New Testament in nine translations of the Gospel of St Matthew.

Two studies focus on translation in the history of English. Matti Kilpiö examines translation vocabulary in the Anglo-Saxon period, drawing on evidence collected from all extant texts to the electronic *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*. In the second paper, Irma Taavitsainen presents an account of the vernacularisation processes in medicine in late medieval England, and offers an overview of the new genres that came into being as a result of these processes.

The next two papers provide a semiotic perspective on translation, interpretation and meaning. Ritva Hartama-Heinonen focuses on semiotranslation, an interdisciplinary attempt drawing on the general sign theory of C.S. Peirce (1839–1914) to give translational activity a new frame of reference through unifying pragmatic semiotics and translation studies. Pirjo Kukkonen examines the communication-oriented theory of signs by Victoria Welby (1837–1912), “Significs”, postulating it as a generic branch of knowledge in which ‘translation’ becomes a hermeneutic method for arriving at knowledge and understanding.

Finally, two articles address the theme of the volume from the viewpoint of philosophy. Panu Raatikainen examines critically some widely influential views on meaning in contemporary philosophy that are directly related to translation, including Thomas Kuhn’s idea of incommensurability, W.V. Quine’s thesis of the indeterminacy of translation; and semantic externalism, associated with Saul Kripke, Keith Donnellan, and Hilary Putnam. In the final paper of the volume, Simo Knuuttila discusses the relationship between historical and rational interpretation in philosophical studies, and provides an account of historical semantics in translations of philosophical texts.