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## Translation ‘errors’

### Teaching, negotiation, and power

#### *Abstract*

This article takes its cue from Vermeer’s seminal 1978 publication, “Ein Rahmen für eine allgemeine Translationstheorie”, in which he argues that translation ‘errors’ do not necessarily involve dysfunctionality. The connection between the concept of ‘errors’ and the communicative function of a translation has been widely discussed in Translation Studies, as have the implications of this connection for translation teaching and learning. However, the teacher’s ability to judge a given translation’s coherence with the real or fictitious target situation often seems to be taken for granted. In this article, I shall discuss the role that negotiation and power play in assessing coherence. I shall argue that, while Vermeer’s dictum can help us relativize and contextualize the importance of ‘errors’, it can also draw attention away from the difficulties of applying the coherence rule to classroom translations (or, in fact, to translations in general).

## 1 Introduction

Hönig quotes the following extract from the source text of an English – German translation exam:

Any system as complex as a human language is bound to lend itself to a variety of independent approaches. For example, languages are used to communicate: one obvious line of research would be to compare human languages with other systems of communication, whether human or not: gestures, railway signals, traffic lights, or the languages of ants and bees. (Hönig 1987: 38, 1997: 198)

He explains that one student translated the last three words as “Bienen und Enten” (“bees and ducks”), and proceeds to discuss the problem of assessment by means of a fictitious dialogue between two translation teachers:

Dozent A: *Ants* mit “Enten” zu übersetzen ist ein elementarer Fehler der schlimmsten Art. Der Grund dafür ist natürlich eine geradezu groteske Interferenz, aber man muß schon erbärmlich schlecht im Englischen sein, um darauf hereinzufallen. Ein solcher Fehler allein disqualifiziert die Übersetzerin – zumindest muß man hier einen dreifachen Fehler geben.

Dozent B: Eigentlich ist der Satz doch in Ordnung, wenn man einmal von einem normalen Leser ausgeht. Man versteht doch, daß die Sprachen der Bienen und der Enten als

Beispiele für andere Kommunikationssysteme genannt werden. Enten kommunizieren doch auch, wenn sie vielleicht dafür nicht so bekannt sind wie die Ameisen.

Darauf wiederum Dozent A: Und daß die Studentin überhaupt kein Englisch kann, stört Dich überhaupt nicht?

Antwort Dozent B: Nein – zumindest nicht, solange man ihr Deutsch versteht!

(Hönig 1997: 198)

'Teacher A: Translating *ants* as "Enten" ["ducks"] is a basic error of the worst kind. The reason is of course a downright grotesque interference, but the student's English must be dismal if she lets herself be bamboozled in this way. This error alone shows that the translator is completely useless – at the very least, it must be triple-weighted.

Teacher B: Actually, I think the sentence is all right if we take the perspective of a normal reader. It's clear enough that the languages of bees and ducks are given as examples of other systems of communication. Ducks do communicate, even if they may be less well-known for it than ants are.

Teacher A retorts: And the fact that the student can't understand plain English doesn't bother you at all?

Teacher B counters: No – at least not as long as she can write plain German!<sup>1</sup>

Teacher A argues like a linguist; Teacher B, like a functionalist. The functionalist school of Translation Studies, of which Hans G. Hönig was a prominent member, was inspired by Hans J. Vermeer's skopos theory. According to Vermeer, a translation needs to work in the target situation; in other words, it needs to fulfil the purpose for which the client has commissioned it, the so-called skopos. The position adopted by Teacher B is very close to what Vermeer says in his seminal article on a framework for a general theory of translation:

Es gibt doch genug 'fehlerhafte', aber voll gelungene Translationen! (Vermeer 1978: 101)<sup>2</sup>

'There are plenty of "erroneous" yet entirely successful translations!'

In Hönig's view, the linguistic error of translating *ants* as "Enten" does not mean that the translation, qua translation, is 'erroneous'. He considers the translation successful because the context makes it clear enough that human language is being contrasted with the languages of two other species. His yardstick is (an assumption about) the target audience's response to the text. This is in line with Vermeer's so-called coherence rule, which reads:

Geglückt ist eine Translation, wenn sie vom Empfänger als hinreichend kohärent mit seiner Situation interpretiert wird und kein Protest, in welcher Form auch immer, zu Übermittlung, Sprache und deren Gemeintem (Sinn) folgt [...]

(Vermeer 1978: 101)

'A translation is successful if recipients interpret it as sufficiently coherent with their situation and raise no protest, in any form, against the transmission, the language, and what is meant (the sense) [...]

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from German are mine.

<sup>2</sup> This article has its origin in a paper I gave at the Hans J. Vermeer Conference held in Germersheim in 2018. Presenters were asked to base their papers on one out of several quotations from various publications by Vermeer. The quotation I chose was the one about 'erroneous' yet successful translations.

The rule serves to reject the demand for perfectionism in general, and the categorical imperative for a translation to be always 'accurate' or 'factually correct' in particular (Vermeer 1978: 101). In a later publication, Vermeer moreover specifies that, even if a translation contains skopos-relevant 'errors',<sup>3</sup> it can still be 'successful' in terms of its overall reception as shown, for instance, by book sales (Reiß/Vermeer 1984: 113, 1984/2015: 101).

Even from a purely functionalist point of view, however, Hönig's example leaves room for doubt. We might introduce a second functionalist teacher, named C, into the exchange:

Teacher B: I think the sentence is all right if we take the perspective of a normal reader. It's clear enough that the languages of bees and ducks are given as examples of other systems of communication. Ducks do communicate, even if they may be less well-known for it than ants are.

Teacher C: I agree that readers would understand the general idea. But they might still find the ducks puzzling. As you say, ducks aren't a prototypical communicating species. In fact, they are quite untypical. Readers might wonder what this example is about.

Teacher B: How do you know they'd wonder?

Teacher C: How do *you* know they wouldn't?

Teacher B: And would it really matter if they did?

Hönig (1997: 204–206) is of course aware that, without comprehensive empirical research, assumptions about reader response must remain speculative. As Vermeer puts it:

Reaktion kann bei einem potentiellen/imaginären (fiktiven) Rezipienten nur als antizipierte/imaginäre (fiktive) Reaktion existieren. (Reiß/Vermeer 1984: 107)

'The reaction of a possible or imaginary (virtual) recipient can only exist as an anticipated or imaginary (virtual) reaction.' (Reiß/Vermeer 1984/2015: 96)

In Hönig's example of an exam situation, it is the teacher who, on the strength of the power associated with his or her social role, decides on the imaginary audience's likely response. If the exam is jointly assessed by two teachers, negotiation may come into play. If the student appeals the grade, a higher level of institutional power will become involved. Audience response, however, will remain imaginary.

The connection between the concept of 'errors' and the communicative function of a translation has been widely discussed in Translation Studies, as have the implications of this connection for translation teaching and learning. A number of scholars besides Vermeer and Hönig have drawn attention to the speculative nature of assumptions about audience response (e. g. Kupsch-Losereit 1986: 16; Pym 1992: 286). However, there

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<sup>3</sup> Christiane Nord and Marina Dudenhöfer's translation refers to 'deficiencies' rather than 'errors': "Many translations are deficient, but some of them have actually been 'successful'" (Reiß/Vermeer 1984/2015: 101). However, to me, both Vermeer's German term, *fehlerhaft*, and the context in which it is originally used suggest 'errors' rather than 'deficiencies' (cf. *OED 2018: deficiency* "something wanting; a defect, an imperfection" vs. *error* "Something incorrectly done through ignorance or inadvertence; a mistake"). A translation that is less than optimally comprehensible might be considered 'deficient' but probably not 'erroneous'. By contrast, a lack of coherence with the target readers' situation – for instance, something that makes no sense to them – would probably constitute a 'deficiency' rooted in an 'error'.

seems to be a lack of in-depth discussion of what this means for assessment in functionalist teaching/learning situations. In the following, I shall discuss one aspect of this issue, namely the role that negotiation and power play in assessing translation students' 'errors'. Methodologically, I shall combine Flyvbjerg's (2001/2017) approach to what he calls 'phronetic' social science<sup>4</sup> with examples from one of my own teaching projects in order to explore how concepts such as 'error' are affected by the classroom situation in general and the roles of students and teachers within this project in particular. I shall argue that, while Vermeer's dictum about 'erroneous' yet successful translations can help us relativize and contextualize the importance of 'errors', it can also draw attention away from the difficulties of applying his coherence rule to classroom translations (or, in fact, to translations in general).

## 2 Background: The translation/revision project and 'phronetic' analysis

My examples will be taken from a one-semester translation and revision project carried out jointly by Don Kiraly, myself, and two student groups. This was one of the numerous classroom projects that Don has implemented and described in his publications (e. g. Kiraly 2000: 101–122, 2012: 127–140; Kiraly/Rüth/Wiedmann 2016: 101–107). Don and I both teach in Mainz University's Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies (FTSK). Our project, whose linguistic structure is shown in Table 1, was organized around the fact that FTSK has separate translation classes for native speakers of German and English. Don's (mostly) German MA students translated two issues of *factor*<sup>5</sup>, a sustainability magazine, into English. Their translations were then revised by my Master's group, who were native speakers of English with a C2-level competence in German. What was unusual about this project was that I worked into my B language, English (for a discussion of directionality, see Hagemann 2019).

	<b>Don Kiraly</b>	<b>Susanne Hagemann</b>
Teacher's translation direction	German B – English A	German A – English B
Students' translation direction	German A – English B German B – English B	German B – English A

Table 1: Translation directions in the joint translation/revision project

Revision processes in the project were actually much more complex than my first brief overview suggests. Initially, Don's students gave each other feedback on their translations and, as a group, also received some general feedback from him. After the translators had completed their own revisions, the texts were sent to me. Don's revision brief for my students read:

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Don Kiraly for alerting me to Flyvbjerg's work and for allowing me to quote from the project described in the following sections.

Proofreaders<sup>5</sup> are to set "Änderungen verfolgen" [Track Changes] in MS Word and deal with ALL errors they find in just one of two ways: A) obvious errors are to be corrected directly in the text; and B) all other errors are to be mentioned in "comments" added using the commenting feature in MS Word. Suggestions in the comments are to be accompanied by evidence justifying them – whenever possible.

The brief thus took it for granted that the revisers would know what was to count as an 'error'. My group worked in teams of two. In each team, the two students first revised each text independently of one another, and then compiled a joint version. I checked their revisions but, for reasons of time, was not able to comment on them in their entirety before they were sent to the translators. In producing the final versions submitted to Don Kiraly, it was up to the translators to decide whether or not to accept the suggestions made by the revisers. Both the translators and Don subsequently provided some feedback on my students' revisions. Lastly, Don himself revised the translators' final versions for delivery to the client.<sup>6</sup> These numerous revision and feedback processes involved a variety of negotiations and power relationships, some of which I shall attempt to analyse using Flyvbjerg's approach.

Drawing on Aristotle, Flyvbjerg (2001/2017: 57) distinguishes between *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*, and lists the main characteristics of *phronesis* as "Ethics. Deliberation about values with reference to praxis. Pragmatic, variable, context-dependent. Oriented toward action. Based on practical value-rationality." He concretizes this somewhat abstract list by means of four value-rational questions, that is, questions which involve values held for their own sake, as opposed to a purely instrumental search for the best means to an end: "(1) Where are we going? (2) Who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is it desirable? (4) What should be done?" (Flyvbjerg 2001/2017: 162)

These questions, together with Flyvbjerg's methodological guidelines (Flyvbjerg 2001/2017: 129–140), will serve as a basis for my analysis of assessment processes in our translation/revision project. Flyvbjerg's approach relates to the social and behavioural sciences, not to Translation Studies, but this is appropriate because I am concerned with the social processes that lead to the identification – or construction – of translation 'errors'.

### 3 Where are we going?

In this section, I shall examine the ways in which translation 'errors' were constituted in our project. *Constitute* refers to a variety of processes, ranging from categorically declaring something wrong to providing reasoned explanations of complex issues. In line

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<sup>5</sup> A number of authors, including Robert (2008: 4–7), have drawn attention to the lack of terminological consensus in the field of revision. Don and I used *proofreading* and *revision* respectively to refer to the same type of procedure, which Brunette (2000: 170–172) calls *didactic revision*.

<sup>6</sup> It is, however, not unusual for *factor<sup>y</sup>* to make changes to the translations before publication. (Information received in conversation with Don Kiraly on 29 October 2018, henceforth referenced as "DK".)

with Flyvbjerg's recommendations (2001/2017: 133–134), my focus will be on "little things" and "actual daily practices", namely 'error' assessment practices, rather than on "important problems" such as the fundamentals of teaching and learning. The power involved in these practices will be understood as "a dense net of omnipresent relations", and analysing it will include the question of "how power is exercised, and not only who has power, and why they have it" (Flyvbjerg 2001/2017: 131–132). Power in general "is seen as productive and positive" (Flyvbjerg 2001/2017: 131).

Examples will be taken from both *factor*<sup>y</sup> issues translated and revised in our project, which I shall refer to as Texts 1 and 2. The choice of examples is to a certain extent random, but I have taken care to include a wide variety of corrections, comments, and silences relating to potential 'errors'. In my discussion of examples, the abbreviations shown in Table 2 will be used to designate the various texts, translators, revisers, and teachers.

ST	Published source text (full reference provided in the list of works cited)
TT	Published target text (full reference provided in the list of works cited)
Tra	Translator in Don Kiraly's group (native speaker of German or of a third language)
TraRev	Reviser in Don Kiraly's translation group (native speaker of German or of a third language)
Rev	Reviser in Susanne Hagemann's revision group (native speaker of English)
DK	Don Kiraly
SH	Susanne Hagemann

Table 2: Abbreviations used to refer to texts, translators, revisers, and teachers

Each of Don Kiraly's students translated one page each of the two source texts, which had been reformatted for translation purposes. Each student's section started with the first complete sentence of a new page. Since this was often in the middle of a paragraph, translators and revisers were required to check the context of the previous section in order to make sense of their own.

I shall discuss three examples in full, from the source text to the published version of the target text, in order to show the entire correction process. In the revisers' corrections within the text, deletions are marked with a strikethrough, and additions are underlined. In the revisers' comments, *Must* and *M* refer to the MoSCoW method of prioritization (Must, Should, Could, Won't), which the revision group had been asked to use in order to distinguish, for example, between demonstrable errors and personal stylistic preferences. For organizational reasons, I was not able to comment on the revisions carried out by my group until after the revised versions had been delivered to the translators.

STa	<i>Published version</i>	[...] der Risikoforscher Ortwin Renn und der Soziologe Harald Welzer sprechen in der factory „Trans-Form“ von „Transformativen Produkten“ <sup>4</sup> . Gemeint sind damit Neuentwicklungen, mit deren Hilfe Menschen auf Dinge ganz verzichten können, ohne dabei an Lebensqualität zu verlieren [...]
	<i>Reformatted translation file; beginning of page = beginning of Tra1's section</i>	von „Transformativen Produkten“ <sup>4</sup> . Gemeint sind damit Neuentwicklungen, mit deren Hilfe Menschen auf Dinge ganz verzichten können, ohne dabei an Lebensqualität zu verlieren [...]
Tra1	<i>Draft translation; text is underlined and marked in blue</i>	<u>4. Those are new inventions using which people will be able to renounce things without losing quality of life [...]</u>
TraRev1	<i>No corrections, no comments</i>	
Rev1a <sup>7</sup>	<i>Suggested revision</i>	<del>4. These are new inventions using which people will be able to renounce things</del> <u>There are new inventions whose use will allow people to forego certain material comforts without losing quality of life [...]</u>
	<i>Comment on “4. ... comforts”</i>	<i>M—Text needed total change for comprehension.</i>
Rev1b	<i>Suggested revision</i>	<u>4. Those are new inventions using with which people will be able to renounce things without losing quality of life [...]</u>
	<i>Formatting</i>	<i>Rev1b retains underlining and blue colour for “4.” but not for the beginning of the sentence.</i>
	<i>Comment on “renounce”</i>	<i>Must: Mistranslation. Renounce only describes some form of public statement to give up a right (e.g. citizenship), an ideology or to disown a family member. “Forego” better describes the source text.</i>
Rev1ab	<i>Suggested revision</i>	<del>4. These are new inventions using which people will be able to renounce things</del> <u>There are new inventions whose use will allow people to forego certain material comforts without losing quality of life [...]</u>
	<i>Formatting</i>	<i>As corrected by Rev1b.</i>
	<i>Comment by Rev1a on “4 ... comforts”</i>	<i>M—Text needed total change for comprehension.</i>
	<i>Comment by Rev1b on “renounce/forego”</i>	<i>Must: Mistranslation. Renounce only describes some form of public statement to give up a right (e.g. citizenship), an ideology or to disown a family member. “Forego” better describes the source text.</i>
SH	<i>Comment on Rev1ab, “There”</i>	<i>German “Gemeint sind damit Neuentwicklungen” explains what “transformative Produkte” means. Did you mean “TheSe are new inventions”?</i>

<sup>7</sup> Rev1a refers to the first reviser of Example 1 in Susanne Hagemann's group; Rev1b, to the second reviser; Rev1ab, to the two revisers' joint final version.

Tra1	<i>Version submitted to DK</i>	<u>4.</u> There are new inventions whose use will allow people to forego certain material comforts without losing quality of life [...]
DK	<i>Comment on "4."</i>	<i>Why is this marked in blue?</i>
	<i>Comment on "whose"</i>	<i>Refers to people, not inventions!</i>
	<i>Comment on "without losing quality of life"</i>	<i>Impossible construction</i>
Tra1	<i>Final version</i>	These products are new inventions which will allow people to forego certain material comforts without losing quality of life
TTa	<i>Published version, unchanged</i>	[...] the risk researcher Ortwin Renn and the sociologist Harald Welzer refer to "transformative products" in the factory issue 'Trans-Form' <sup>4</sup> . These products are new inventions which will allow people to forego certain material comforts without losing quality of life [...]

Example 1

One aspect that seems worth discussing is the beginning of the section. Tra1 seems to have failed to recognize 4 as a footnote number, presumably because it does not appear in superscript in the reformatted translation file (see above under STa). Accordingly, 4. at the very beginning suggests that the following sentence is being numbered. This is not commented on in any of the revised versions (unless DK's question about the blue colour is an oblique suggestion that the translator might want to check the source text). As far as the beginning of the first sentence is concerned, Tra1 evidently realizes that *Gemeint sind damit* is an explanation of a phrase in the previous sentence; the translation *Those are* is reasonably clear though perhaps stylistically suboptimal. TraRev1 and Rev1b accept Tra1's version, whereas Rev1a rewrites it in a way that would make sense if the inventions were being newly introduced but is not consistent with the end of the previous section (see above under STa, TTa). The joint revised version by Rev1ab includes this rewriting rather than Rev1b's small-scale corrections. This is not necessarily the result of a discussion between the two revisers; it could also be due to a technical problem (merging the revisers' two versions in Microsoft Word). SH comments on the issue, but only after the revisions have been sent to the translators. Tra1 accepts the rewriting; DK does not object. However, the translator's final version corrects the sentence in a stylistically appropriate way. This may be the result of a discussion between the translator and the teacher (DK).

There is more. When I reread the preceding paragraph some time after I had written it, I was no longer sure whether what I had classified as a miscorrection would have caused problems at all. Rev1a's version is evidently less coherent than the published text, but it might actually have worked; in other words, it might have been successful in the terms described by Vermeer (1978: 101). Recipients might have made the connection between *transformative products* and *There are new inventions*, and even if not, they



would not necessarily have worried about the term *transformative products*. Rev1a's version is factually correct albeit inaccurate and less than coherent. The published text constitutes an improvement in terms of both accuracy and skopos, but it is only from an accuracy perspective that I can declare Rev1a's version to be unacceptable.<sup>8</sup> From the perspective taken by Vermeer (1978: 101), the question of whether or not this version is successful is undecidable without empirical research. As Nobs has shown in several publications (e. g. Nobs 2003, 2010), readers' assessment of translation quality can be quite heterogeneous and does not necessarily prioritize linguistic 'errors'.

Another interesting point is DK's revision. In addition to the blue colour, DK objects to *whose* and *without losing quality of life*. However, while some grammarians do criticize the use of *whose* for inanimate antecedents (e. g. Fenn 2010: 538), others consider it perfectly correct (e. g. Huddleston/Pullum/Peterson 2002: 1049–1050). It is clearly not a 'binary error' in Pym's (1992: 282) sense. Similarly, while a Google search in the .uk domain shows that *lose quality of life* is not a particularly frequent collocation (*sacrifice*, for example, is much more frequent and perhaps less awkward), it is difficult to see why the construction should be impossible. Tellingly, the phrase is retained in the published version, while *whose use* is simplified to *which*.

What about the constitution of 'errors' in Example 1? Rev1b corrects the obvious formatting problem as well as an inappropriate preposition, and comments on a verb that is semantically wrong. Both of the linguistic changes made are easily verifiable – *using/with which* for example by means of a Google or corpus search and *renounce/forego* by consulting a monolingual dictionary. Rev1a, by contrast, simply informs Tra1 that rewriting is necessary "for comprehension"; no explanation is provided of why Tra1's translation is difficult to understand. This rewriting leaves Tra1 with various options: accept it in an act of belief; reject it in total because of the coherence problem caused by *There are*; or accept Rev1a's opinion that the sentence must be rewritten and attempt to do so in a way that preserves coherence. As far as the two teachers' comments are concerned, both SH and DK assume that detailed explanations are unnecessary. SH neither spells out the coherence problem nor explains why changing *There* to *These* might solve it. Rev1a's 'error' is thus pointed out quite obliquely. DK is more direct in indicating that there are 'errors', but the rationale behind the classification is not entirely clear. Moreover, the published version, which is identical to Tra1's final version, seems to invalidate one of the comments. In Example 1, therefore, the way in which revisers and teachers construct 'errors' is in part arbitrary and does not in all cases result in improvements to the text.

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<sup>8</sup> It is not unusual for revisers to lose sight of the skopos. Britta Nord (2018: 142) discusses an example from her work as a freelance reviser, which shows how she lets herself be sidetracked by semantic correctness even though it is virtually certain that the semantic issue in question will not affect the functioning of the target text. Unnecessary interventions form a feature of revision, as, for example, Arthem (1983: 54–56) shows in his pioneering study of revision quality.

Example 1 shows a student revision process whose outcome does not satisfy DK. By contrast, in Example 2, the revision process results in an acceptable translation.

STa	<i>Published version</i>	Eher war Klimaschutz eine Art Schmuckelement für wenige. Diejenigen, die es erkannt haben und in Effizienzmaßnahmen investieren, sehen es sicher als Sicherung von Zukunft und Wettbewerbsfähigkeit.
Tra2	<i>Draft translation</i>	Climate protection was rather something only a few could decorate themselves with. Those who have realized it and invest in efficiency measures most likely see it as ensuring the future and maintaining competitiveness.
TraRev2	<i>Suggested revision</i>	Climate protection was rather something only a few could <del>decorate</del> <u>adorn</u> themselves with. Those who have realized <del>it the importance and invest</del> <u>have invested</u> in efficiency measures <del>most likely see it</del> <u>consider it certainly</u> as <del>ensuring the</del> <u>securing their</u> future and maintaining competitiveness.
	<i>Explanations</i>	'Errors' classified as "grammar" ("have invested") and "expression" (other changes suggested).
Tra2	<i>Revised version submitted to Rev2ab</i>	Climate protection was rather something only a few could adorn themselves with. Those who have realized its importance and invest in efficiency measures certainly consider it as securing their future and competitiveness.
Rev2a	<i>Comment on "something only a few could adorn themselves with"</i>	<i>Must: It's not possible to adorn yourself with climate protection. Maybe: "Climate protection was rather a way of boasting for a few."??</i>
Rev2b	<i>Comment on "was"</i>	<i>COULD: I would change this to "used to be" to make it clear that this is one of the perspectives you are talking about in the first sentence of your next paragraph.</i>
	<i>Comment on "adorn"</i>	<i>MUST: "...only a few could afford (the privilege of)." Adorning is very rarely used outside of contexts involving clothing and jewelry.</i>
Rev2ab	<i>Rev2b, suggested revision</i>	Climate protection was rather something only a few could <del>adorn themselves with</del> <u>boast of</u> .
	<i>Rev2b, comment on "was"</i>	<i>COULD: I would change this to "used to be" to make it clear that this is one of the perspectives you are talking about in the first sentence of your next paragraph.</i>
	<i>Rev2b, comment on "adorn"</i>	<i>MUST: Adorning is very rarely used outside of contexts involving clothing and jewelry.</i>
	<i>Rev2a, comment on "adorn"</i>	<i>Must: It's not possible to adorn yourself with climate protection. Maybe: "Climate protection was rather a way of boasting for a few."??</i>
SH	<i>No comments</i>	

Tra2	<i>Version submitted to DK</i>	Climate protection used to be rather something only a few could boast of. Those who have realized its importance and invest in efficiency measures certainly consider it as securing their future and competitiveness.
DK	<i>No comments or corrections</i>	
TTa	<i>Unchanged</i>	

Example 2

Among the changes proposed by TraRev2, Tra2 accepts some that involve improvements and ignores or modifies others that involve new 'errors'. TraRev2's suggestion to replace *it* by *the importance* is further amended by introducing a possessive. The phrase *its importance* makes it clear that the reference is to climate protection, and thus corrects a source textual cohesion defect reproduced in the first, literal translation. When faced with two slightly divergent responses to *adorn* by Rev2a and Rev2b, Tra2 chooses Rev2b's correction, which is less close to the semantics of the source text but makes sense in context and – presumably – sounds fluent. Tra2 also implements Rev2b's recommendation to change *was* to *used to be*. However, other parts of the text make it clear that Tra2 does not automatically trust Rev2ab even though they are native speakers of English. For instance, Tra2 rejects Rev2b's criticism of a metaphorical use of *the workbenches of the world* (and in fact, the metaphor is subsequently accepted by DK).

As far as the constitution of 'errors' in Example 2 is concerned, TraRev2's suggested corrections are only sparsely explained. While some of them are clearly useful, others are linguistically problematic and appear arbitrary. By contrast, Rev2ab provide more extensive explanations. Their comments on *adorn* seem debatable to me in so far as they are at odds with some of the definitions and examples given by the *OED* (2018), but this does not negatively affect the final version of the target text. Overall, it is clearly Tra2 who is in charge of the revision process. Tra2 critically evaluates the revisers' suggestions and comments and therefore ultimately decides what counts as an 'error'. Tra2's linguistic competence and translatorial self-confidence play an important role in making the revision process successful.

The context of my third and final example is the divestment movement, more specifically the assets that the movement represents and that it intends to pull out of fossil-fuel companies.

STb	<i>Published version</i>	Alle zusammen repräsentieren ein Vermögen von addiert rund 3,4 Billionen US-Dollar, das "fossil-free" werden soll.
Tra3	<i>Draft translation</i>	All together they represent a capital of approximately USD 3.4trn in total; that capital should become "fossil-free".
TraRev3	<i>Suggested revision</i>	[...] that capital <del>should become</del> <u>will be</u> 'fossil-free'.
Tra3	<i>Revised version submitted to Rev3ab</i>	[...] that capital will be 'fossil-free'.

Rev3ab	<i>Suggested revision</i>	[...] that capital <del>will</del> <u>should</u> be 'fossil-free'.
	<i>Comment on "should"</i>	<i>Must: I think using 'will' here strays too far from the meaning in the original sentence, which says 'werden soll'.</i>
Tra3	<i>Version submitted to DK</i>	[...] that capital should be fossil-free.
SH	<i>Comment on "<del>will should</del>", written after Rev3ab sent the text to Tra3</i>	<i>I agree that will is wrong, but should also seems wrong to me. There is a difference between soll and sollte.</i>
Rev3ab	<i>Responses to SH's feedback</i>	<i>Both revisers accept the comment on "<del>will should</del>".</i>
DK	<i>First response to Tra3: no comments or corrections</i>	
	<i>Second response, after rereading the text</i>	that capital <del>should</del> <u>is supposed</u> be fossil-free.
TTb	<i>Published version</i>	[...] that capital is supposed be fossil-free.

### Example 3

Tra3 accepts both TraRev3's and Rev3ab's suggestions. This involves first changing *should become* to *will be*, and then changing it back to *should be*. Linguistically, as SH points out, neither solution is entirely appropriate. The German modal *soll* expresses an intention which is more binding than *should* and less certain than *will*. However, looking back at the comment I wrote in 2017, it seems to me that I was sidetracked by semantic accuracy. This was perhaps due to the revision brief, which referred to "ALL errors"; *all* includes linguistic as well as translational 'errors'. Example 3 may share some similarities with Hönig's ants and ducks. *Should* and *will* are not ideal solutions but I consider it likely that, read in context, neither would lead to misinterpretations. This may be the reason why DK, in his first response, accepts Tra3's version. On rereading the translation, however, DK corrects *should be* to *is supposed be*. I shall not compare the semantics of *soll* and *is supposed* here; what is more interesting for my present purpose is the inadvertent typo, the missing *to*. On the one hand, this is a very obvious 'error' introduced by the teacher, which Tra3 either does not notice or is indifferent about, and which finds its way into the published version. On the other hand, the target text is fully comprehensible, and the source text is not free of typos either (cf. in the same article "Das Geld fließt zu Menschen in Entwicklungs- und Schwellenländer", instead of *Schwellenländern*).

Example 3 starkly contrasts with Example 2. The process of constituting 'errors' is dominated by revisers and teachers. Tra3 accepts the corrections made by TraRev3 and Rev3ab, and fails to draw attention to DK's typo. Similarly, Rev3ab accept SH's somewhat cryptic objection even though they might have defended their own solution from a functionalist perspective. The point at issue here is not whether the changes made are for the better or worse but how they get made. In Example 3, there is no evidence of agency on the part of Tra3, and Rev3ab's agency is limited to their interaction with Tra3.

This example is fairly representative of Tra3's section in its entirety, although there are a few instances where Tra3 and Rev3ab take a more active role.

Towards the end of the project, Don Kiraly sent a thank-you message in which he emphasized the “utterly amazing high quality of the final [...] texts”. However, the message left open the question of what the revisers' share in achieving this quality was: “It would have been a Herculean task to identify what exactly [the revisers] did to enhance and or hamper my translators' work – but the end products speak for themselves”. Consequently, the translators' grades reflected both their own and the revisers' performance; it was exclusively the teamwork that was graded. By contrast, in my revision course I focused on the revisers' work, which I graded on a pass/fail basis. I introduced an element of negotiation by explicitly inviting students to respond to any points in the feedback they had received with which they disagreed. Students made use of this opportunity to varying degrees.

#### **4 Who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power?**

The previous section, which was devoted to Flyvbjerg's question “Where are we going?”, followed his methodological guidelines for phronetic analysis, which emphasize the importance of paying attention to the details of daily practices. In this section, I shall concentrate on his second question, which concerns the workings of power in these practices. As mentioned above, the concept of power has positive connotations in Flyvbjerg's model.

The examples discussed in the previous section yield no clear and consistent picture of the workings of power on the level of translators and revisers. In Example 1, TraRev1 does not get involved at all even though Tra1's formatting error is very conspicuous. The dynamics of decision-making between Rev1a and Rev1b have not been documented, and it is therefore uncertain whether the fact that Rev1a's coherence-damaging rewriting has prevailed over Rev1b's small-scale corrections is due to Rev1a winning an argument or to a technological mishap. As far as Tra1 is concerned, it seems likely that the translator simply accepts the revisers' suggestion without checking its contextual appropriateness. Similarly, in Example 3, Tra3 accepts both TraRev3's and Rev3ab's corrections, which involves first changing and then restoring the original phrasing chosen by Tra3. In Example 2, by contrast, it is obvious that Tra2 examines TraRev2's and Rev2ab's suggestions critically before deciding whether and how to incorporate them. In all three examples, one version of the A-language revisers' suggestions finds its way into the translator's final version, though the project texts in their entirety also include instances of the translators contradicting the native speakers.

Power on the level of students can thus be seen to be dispersed. In this project (as opposed to, e. g., ISO 17100 2015: 17), the translator was free to accept, modify, or reject the revisers' suggestions. Formal power within the student revision process thus rested with the translator. However, as Flyvbjerg (2001/2017: 132) points out, what is interesting is “how power is exercised, and not only who has power, and why they have it;

the focus is on process in addition to structure.” In actual fact, in the examples discussed, only one of the three translators makes use of the possibility to override a reviser’s recommendations. The A-language revisers’ recommendations in particular have an even better chance of being accepted than those made by the B-language translator-revisers. This may be due to a general attribution of competence (i. e. native-speaker prestige) as well as respect for the perceived linguistic fluency of their corrections (i. e. the prioritization of one aspect of translational appropriateness).

Structural power in the student/teacher relationship lies with the teacher. In the *factor<sup>y</sup>* project, however, two factors contributed to reducing SH’s power: one was directionality (an A–B teacher working with B–A students) and the other, a tight time schedule (which resulted in a post-factum commentary on the revisers’ performance rather than interference with the corrections they delivered to the translators). Moreover, expressly inviting students to negotiate about any points of disagreement may have further contributed to a certain levelling out of power.

In the case of DK, two opposing tendencies can be identified. On the one hand, by having students revise the translations and refraining from commenting on the draft translations himself, he relinquished some of his power over the identification of ‘errors’. His feedback to his students during the first revision stage was limited to general exhortations such as “I have now looked at many of your texts and found that NONE of the proofreading jobs that indicated fewer than eight to ten errors is sufficiently thorough to allow you to pass this course.” On the other hand, it was he who dominated the final stages of work on the project texts – first by his comments on the revised translations (which he discussed with the translators as and when necessary) and then by his final corrections before delivery to the client (which were mainly stylistic and which he did not discuss [DK]). He clearly held the ultimate authority in the project up until delivery.

Who gains and who loses by these mechanisms of power? Since teaching/learning is not a zero-sum game, we should not necessarily expect some stakeholders in the translation process to gain and others to lose. I shall consider the various stakeholders and their potential expectations one by one. My focus will mainly be on the issue of ‘errors’ rather than on the much wider question of gain and loss resulting from the translation/revision project in general.

The most important stakeholders in any teaching/learning project are, of course, the students. They form a heterogeneous group and can be assumed to have various competing goals. More specifically, as Round points out, there are different types of student motivation:

- 1) Motivation for entering higher education, and for choosing a particular institution and course (*‘entry motivation’*)<sup>9</sup>
- 2) Motivation for engaging with day-to-day coursework tasks, contact hours and student activities (*‘daily motivation’*)

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<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, emphasis in quotations is the original author’s.

- 3) Motivation to gain something at the end of their course, e. g. a degree, a particular kind of job or rate of pay, a particular social position or self esteem (*'future motivation'*)  
(Round 2005: 28)

Round notes that “separating *daily motivation* from the other two is necessary because a student can have an abundance of *entry motivation* and *future motivation*, but these may simply not translate into the willingness to perform the relatively small daily tasks which will fulfil them.” (Round 2005: 28) For instance, a student whose main motivation consists in obtaining any kind of degree may pursue her studies differently from a student who is excited by her subject and enjoys the coursework. What is interesting about the translation/revision project is that it catered to different types of motivation. Student translators and revisers with a high degree of daily motivation were able to use the revision process for enhancing their own language, translation, and/or revision skills. They moreover gained an opportunity to critically reflect on the constitution of ‘errors’ and on the connection between ‘errors’ and assumptions about linguistic and translatorial competence. At the same time, translators whose main motivation was future-related were able to choose to save time and effort by simply accepting the revisers’ identification of ‘errors’, that is, by relinquishing their power over and responsibility for the text. Similarly, it was possible for A-language revisers with future motivation, for example, to ignore the teacher’s explicit instruction to check the target text against the source text, and thus shift responsibility for identifying fluent but ‘inaccurate’ translations onto the translation group. However, revisers ran a greater risk than future-oriented translators because their grades, in contrast to the translators’, related to their individual performance rather than to teamwork.

Teachers’ motivations may differ widely as well. Han and Yin’s meta-study lists a variety of motivating factors ranging from financial benefits to evaluation and from self-realization to altruism (Han/Yin 2016: 6). In so far as self-analysis is valid, I can say that one component of my own motivation is a desire to enable student learning. In my case, this includes trying to persuade students with a low daily motivation to perform the required tasks. I moreover feel obliged to check students’ translations and revisions carefully and to discuss the appropriateness or otherwise of their suggestions with them. However, when it comes to identifying ‘errors’, I endeavour to resist the temptation to exercise my institutional power, preferring to aim for consensus-based solutions. I view myself as having gained from the project because the B–A & A–B constellation made negotiation and consensus essential and because, despite some difficulties (see Hagemann 2019), most students said in the concluding evaluation that they found both the revision course in general and my feedback on their revisions in particular useful.

The client gained from the project in general because the end product was a gratis translation whose quality was not perfect but sufficient for publication. Both the student revision process and Don Kiraly’s final proofreading made a contribution to quality. The client, on the other hand, created the layout but does not seem to have carried out large-scale verbal modifications. Leaving the identification and correction of ‘errors’ to FTSK

constituted a gain in terms of time and effort, and perhaps also – depending on staff competences – in terms of quality.

Finally, the magazine's non-German speaking readers were gainers because translations were made available to them. From the perspective of Vermeer's model, these readers are the recipients who assess the translations' coherence or otherwise with their situation and, therefore, the degree to which the texts can be considered successful. According to Vermeer, their power is high because they are the ultimate judges of translation quality and the significance of 'errors'. However, this power did not actually affect the project because the participating students and teachers had no access to readers' responses and were consequently unable to include them in their assessment of 'errors'. In fact, despite several years of translating for *factor*<sup>9</sup>, no feedback from readers, be it praise or criticism, ever seems to have reached the translators (DK). This does not, of course, invalidate Vermeer's theoretical model, but it shows that the model is no blueprint for translation teaching.

Did any stakeholders lose, or was the project a win-win approach? The fact that the translation teacher did not directly participate in the identification of 'errors' until the end of the revision process may have constituted a drawback as well as an advantage. While the teacher's late involvement may have promoted (some) students' sense of responsibility, it also meant a lack of individual recognition for proficient translators, who received the same kind of praise from the teacher as poor translators with proficient revisers. However, this would not make the proficient translators losers unless their main motivation was a desire for recognition. By contrast, the implications for those stakeholders who were not immediately connected with the project are less clear. Thus, students whose translations were 'error'-prone passed the course on the strength of the help given to them by the revisers. As a general principle, this may or may not be in the interests of the university and of society at large, depending on whether their goal is a high number of MA graduates or a high degree of competence for graduates. It is probably not in the interests of students' potential future clients or employers because it makes degree certificates unreliable. This unreliability in turn can constitute a loss for proficient graduates. However, it can of course be counterbalanced by the use of different grading systems in other courses. Moreover, the project may have made some less proficient translators aware that they need to seek assistance if they wish to pursue a career in translation (DK).

## **5 Is it desirable? What should be done?**

The question of whether the workings of power outlined in the previous sections are desirable or not is a value-rational one. In other words, the answers we give will depend on the values we hold and more specifically on our attitude to teaching and learning. If we expect teachers to adopt the roles of expert and/or formal authority, we will probably not approve of a project in which one teacher refrains from intervening in the minutiae of the translation and revision process and another lacks the A-language competence that,



among translation teachers in Germany, is often considered essential for the target language.<sup>10</sup> This link between values and (dis)approval requires no exhaustive discussion. I shall rather examine the question of desirability from the perspective of student-centred learning, which will allow a more differentiated analysis because it forms the background to the project's conception. Teachers in this perspective are facilitators and/or delegators who guide students and help them achieve autonomy. My interpretation of the project in this context is intended as a contribution to an ongoing dialogue or, in Flyvbjerg's words, to "a polyphony of voices, with no one voice, including that of the researcher, claiming final authority" (Flyvbjerg 2001/2017: 139).

Much of the work of the translation group was characterized by a delegation of power from the teacher to the students. It was the students who were responsible for assessing 'errors' and improving the text. This approach is of course desirable from the point of view of student autonomy. However, in the final project stages, the teacher asserted his authority by demanding a further revision and/or making corrections himself. This is by no means unusual with project work, but it does detract from students' autonomy and responsibility. Whether the process can or should be changed is another matter. In project work for a client, it is the teacher who is responsible for ensuring quality, and this responsibility cannot be delegated except by agreement with the client. With tight time constraints, additional full-scale iterations of the revision process may not be possible. What seems important to me on the meta-level is that the teacher's role in the revision process should be clearly described in publications on classroom projects in order to avoid the impression that students work as fully autonomous translators (see e. g. Ábrego/Müller 2013: 109–112 and other contributions to Hansen-Schirra/Kiraly 2013, or Krenzler-Behm 2013: 339).

In the revision group, the teacher (myself) delegated even more power to the students by having them deliver their comments and corrections to Don Kiraly's group without first obtaining my approval. However, in retrospect, I think that the time schedule of the project should ideally have allowed me to comment on my students' revisions before delivery. As it turned out, both some of the revisers and myself made unjustified assumptions about what the translators and revisers respectively had done. For instance, two revisers told me that they had assumed the translation group would ensure completeness and factual 'accuracy', whereas I had assumed the revisers would check the target text against the source text in accordance with the instructions provided by Don and myself. More generally, the quality of the student revision process was lower than I had expected. Discussing the revisions before delivery would have decreased students' autonomy but increased the quality of the revised texts. It would have intensified our negotiation about 'errors' but also my exercise of power because I could (and would) have returned unsatisfactory revisions for reworking.

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<sup>10</sup> For teachers' roles as well as attitudes and practices, see e. g. Zhu/Valcke/Schellens (2010: 149, 154–157).

On a more general level, the project can be analysed in terms of Flyvbjerg's view that, while knowledge constitutes power, it is also true to say that "[p]ower is knowledge" (Flyvbjerg 2001/2017: 155). With the assessment of 'errors', as with the urban renewal project that Flyvbjerg discusses, "the decisive aspect [...] is not whether the one or the other interpretation is 'correct' [...] but which party can put the greatest power behind its interpretation. The interpretation, which has the stronger power base, becomes [...] truth, understood as the actually realized physical [...] reality." (Flyvbjerg 2001/2017: 153) The adage that knowledge is power can be applied to those parts of the translation/revision project where negotiation took place. The revisers were required to explain their suggestions; the translators were free to accept, modify, or reject the suggestions; the A-language revisers were invited to respond to the teacher's comments. But even in these situations, power can override knowledge. This seems to be the case for example with Rev1a's miscorrection and its acceptance by Tra1 – Rev1a provides an unsubstantiated assertion rather than an explanation, and Tra1, who ought to know better, implements the change. However, Flyvbjerg's dictum that power is knowledge is most obviously relevant to the teachers' role. A teacher's institutional and procedural power is of course associated with the assumption that he or she knows more than students do, but while this assumption will often prove true, teachers are not infallible. For instance, they will occasionally overlook, or even actively commit, 'errors'. These 'errors' may become part of the physical reality that is the published text. This may not be desirable, but it is difficult to avoid. The situation will remain largely unchanged if clients decide to further modify the text; in this case, power will simply shift to them, and the inevitable occasional 'errors' will be theirs.

## 6 Conclusion: 'Erroneous' yet successful?

What does the translation/revision project tell us about Vermeer's statement that "[t]here are plenty of 'erroneous' yet entirely successful translations" (Vermeer 1978: 101), and more specifically about the role played by negotiation and power in assessing students' 'errors'? Vermeer's coherence rule, which focuses on recipients' protest or (silent) acceptance, is not relevant to the project because the recipients did not figure in our discussion of 'errors'. The data which Vermeer's framework would have required for evaluating the success or otherwise of the translations produced were not available within the project, and obtaining them by means of a survey would have been difficult and time-consuming. It is of course possible to apply the coherence rule speculatively. This is what I have done in my discussion of Example 1 (*Those* vs. *There are new inventions*) and Example 3 (*should* vs. *will* vs. *is supposed to*), where I have hypothesized about the comprehensibility of sentences that are linguistically 'erroneous'. However, in so doing I have drawn on my own discursive power as a researcher rather than on assessment by means of reception.

In contrast to the recipients' response, the notion of accuracy did play a role in the project. While I generally favour functionalist approaches, in the revision course I seem

to have paid much attention to accuracy. I have discussed this in connection with Example 1 and Example 3. For the examples I have analysed, it is probably correct to say that accuracy is a viable option which will result in a comprehensible text. The degree to which the less accurate student versions are comprehensible is a matter of speculation. Addressee profiles, as advocated by Christiane Nord (1999), will not do much to mitigate the uncertainty in these two cases. In the classroom situations described, it is the teachers' power that decides the issue. Even if the teachers are able to justify their decisions, the fact that I am having second thoughts about mine shows that there is an element of arbitrariness involved. This could perhaps be reduced by means of negotiation. If consensus could be reached in a group discussion, this would be a stronger indicator of coherence and comprehensibility than the teacher's opinion on its own. Modesty and respect for others, which Horguelin and Pharand (1978/2009: 80) regard as essential qualities for revisers in general, would be crucial to the success of revision negotiations as well.

To conclude, while I continue to believe that the notion of 'erroneous' yet successful translations can be useful in assessment, the examples I have focused on here show that gauging success can be quite difficult. Vermeer's theoretical model does not, and is presumably not intended to, provide us with an algorithm for translation teaching. In the absence of solid empirical evidence, negotiation and power play a significant role in the assessment process. This role should be acknowledged and reflected upon.

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