

# Paving the way to the text: book titles as a functional unit in translation

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This paper deals with the translation of book titles. It is based on a large corpus of titles of fiction, non-fiction and children's books in English, German, Spanish and French. One part of the corpus dates from 1987; it was used for an earlier study on book titles and headings of short stories, poems, and scholarly articles (cf. Nord 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1993b, 1997); the other part dates from 2017 and contains only book titles. It was used to find out whether the results have changed over the thirty years between 1987 and 2017. The analysis of the corpus showed that all titles are intended to fulfil two basic functions, a distinctive function (like that of proper names) and a phatic function, in that they distinguish the co-text from other texts and establish a first contact with a potential readership. Apart from these two basic functions, titles are also intended to achieve one or more of three optional functions: a referential function (informing about certain aspects of the co-texts, such as contents and form), an expressive function (praising the qualities of the co-text), and an appellative function (appealing to a potential reader to buy/read the book and/or to interpret it in a particular way). The analysis is both quantitative and qualitative, showing the form, frequency and distribution of function markers in the corpus titles. Later studies on headlines of magazine articles (Nord 1993c) and section headings in Bible translation (Nord 2012) have revealed that the methodology used for the study can also be applied to other types of titles and headings. Unlike other authors who consider the title as a peri-, epi- or paratext (cf. Genette 1982) I regard it as a text in its own right, since it fulfils all the textuality conditions proposed, for example, by de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). Titles are metatexts which refer to, but are not part of, a co-text. Numerous anecdotes are told about titles without co-texts and co-texts with different titles, according to when and where they are published (see, for example, Schnitzler 1983, 173). Some titles are formulated by an editor or the publisher, and not by the author of the co-text. Titles are used for a certain set of functions in standardized situations, and, therefore, they form a genre with particular genre conventions. Conventions are culture-specific. To make a translated title "function" in the target culture, it may be necessary to adapt conventional and functional features to target-cultural standards. In line with a skopos-oriented view of texts as offers of information (Reiss and Vermeer 2013), the paper illustrates the ways in which translated titles can (or cannot) successfully pave the way to the text.,

It is a well-known fact that translators do not normally have the last word in the process of deciding on the title of a book they have translated. Nevertheless, if they can offer good arguments for or against certain title formulations, they might at least be heard. At any rate, just pleading for a "faithful" translation of the original title will not do.

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