

1 Introduction

A proposal for a user-centered model of translation

It is almost a truism to say that translators always think about their future readers. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that most translators would like to prioritize the target readers and their needs when they make translational decisions. However, the ways in which this taking into account is actually accomplished have remained rather implicit and unratified in practice and under-theorized in research. Since the 1980s, functionalist translation theory has been one main trend in translation studies, focusing on the purpose of the translation and arguing that the translator needs to adapt the text according to the needs of the future readers. However, moving from abstract theorizing about audiences to actual practice has not always been smooth. In her recent overview of the current state and future of functionalist theory, Christiane Nord (2012: 32) laments the difficulties of bridging this gap between theory and practice:

Audience orientation has been a particularly sensitive aspect of functionalist theory and applications from the start. Critics have been asking how translators know what the audience expects of a translation. Indeed, it is easy to talk about the audience's expectations but much more difficult to obtain empirical proof of what audiences (for certain genres or in certain nonlinguistic fields) really expect.

In this book we offer practical tools and methods for making reader-orientedness an explicit part of the translation process. **User-Centered Translation (UCT)** is, in other words, closely related to functional translation theories, and we consider the UCT tools as a means to operationalize the ideas of translation as a purposeful and skopos-oriented action (see also Section 3.5). User-centered translation is a neologism, coined to emphasize the central role of the user, or reader, in the translation process. UCT means that we gather as much information about our future users as we can through various methods during the entire translation process, and that we design and revise the translation based on this information. Utilizing various practical tools and methods described in this book, translators can improve their skills at taking the needs of the target audience into consideration and enhance the usability of their translations.

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The methods described in this book allow translators to obtain empirical proof of actual readers and their needs and preferences. As a textbook, this book also helps fill in another gap: Nord (2012: 32) emphasizes the affinities of functionalist theories with translator training but she argues that “the development of functionalist teaching material is still in its infancy”. Furthermore, although the textbook format indicates academic readerships, we also hope that this book finds readers within the field of practical translation.

The translation industry has recently been characterized by a highly competitive market situation, as companies have tried to secure customers, and, for lack of other suitable criteria, calls for tenders have been won by the lowest bidder. To step beyond this game, translators and translation companies need to become more versatile and more innovative, offering translation-related services that are clearly identifiable and bring added value to the customers. User-centered translation offers one model for such diversification that allows translation companies to escape the blood-red oceans of rivals fighting over a shrinking pool of profits and to sail to the less contested blue oceans by creating new value to customers and by redefining the products and services offered (Kim and Mauborgne 2005). UCT is a comprehensive framework that can be aligned with the client’s overall information management process and designed individually for each project to ensure a maximum fit between the translated text and its users.

To empower translators and to widen the palette of services that they can offer, we have turned our attention to interfaces between **usability research** and translation (studies). The tools and methods described in this book have been selected from among those regularly in use in usability research and design. This book is practical in its aim: we want to offer translators and translation students new tools and new ways of thinking, with which they might be able to bring a more user-centered approach to their work. We look for links between usability and translation studies, and introduce concepts and findings from usability research into the practice of translation. Translation students and teachers will find, however, that the step from translation studies to usability research is not always very long, and that many methods – such as think-aloud protocols, eyetracking, or focus groups – are familiar to them from translation research, although they are not regularly employed into translation practice. In addition to translation practice, these interfaces between usability research and translation studies will also offer new angles into translation teaching and research.

The two important concepts behind user-centered translation are **usability** and **user experience**. Usability refers to the ease with which users can use a product to achieve their goals; they should be able to achieve their goals according to their expectations and without obstacles or hindrances. When software is designed and texts are produced in a user-centered way, the aim is to create products and texts that are as usable as possible. To the user, high usability means having to take less time to learn new things, and being able to get a grip of the task at hand more quickly. Improving usability also promotes memorability and allows us to work more efficiently. The users make fewer errors, and they feel that they are enjoying the task (Ovaska *et al.* 2005: 14). The notion of enjoyability emphasizes the role

of user experience: while usability focuses on products being learnable or memorable, user experience is a holistic concept encompassing issues such as aesthetics, fun and pleasure.

The concept of usability is not widely used in translation studies as of yet, and studies that do take advantage of usability are limited to some areas of translation, predominantly in the technical field. In his work *Technical Translation: Usability Strategies for Translating Technical Documentation*, Jody Byrne (2010) focuses on usability in technical texts, considering how translators can improve the usability of user instructions during the translation process. At the end of his book, Byrne (2010: 255–256) raises the question whether usability has any role outside technical translation. Our answer is yes, and this book continues where Byrne leaves off: we will investigate usability in a wide context, taking into consideration different areas of translation; to us, the world of usability does not only pertain to technical and instructive texts, although the idea of using a text and usability is more easily applied in some genres than in others.

One of the pathways through which usability issues are gradually making their way to translation studies is technical communication, where usability has been an important consideration for a long time. Technical documentation, such as user instructions, is being produced as an inherent part of the interface, device or system that is being documented; consequently, the usability considerations associated with the interfaces, devices or systems extend to various forms of user assistance, too. Because of this background, this book takes advantage of elements from technical communication where appropriate. The connection between translation studies and technical communication is, in fact, quite logical, as many technical communicators who design and write technical documentation were originally trained as translators and they produce texts that often end up being translated (Suojanen 2010; Risku 2004).

Usability research and translation studies are both fields that have a strong practical orientation. The juxtaposition of theory and practice can occasionally lead to some conceptual dilemmas: Do we talk about *translation* or *translation studies* when we refer to the topic of this book? Is user-centered translation a theory or a practical model, or can it be both? We do not think that theory and practice must be separated from each other: while our position for offering this model is academic, we see it as a framework for practice, something that we as researchers feel we can offer for practising translators. Thus, *translation* and *translation studies* go hand in hand in this book. The same can be said for *usability* and *usability research*, where it can be difficult to decide which term is most suitable for which context. One of the overarching objectives of this book is therefore to transcend these divides and to encourage interaction between translators and researchers, and between usability experts and translation professionals and scholars.

1.1 The UCT process

The title of this book, *User-Centered Translation (UCT)*, is a coinage parallel to *User-Centered Design (UCD)* familiar from usability research. During the

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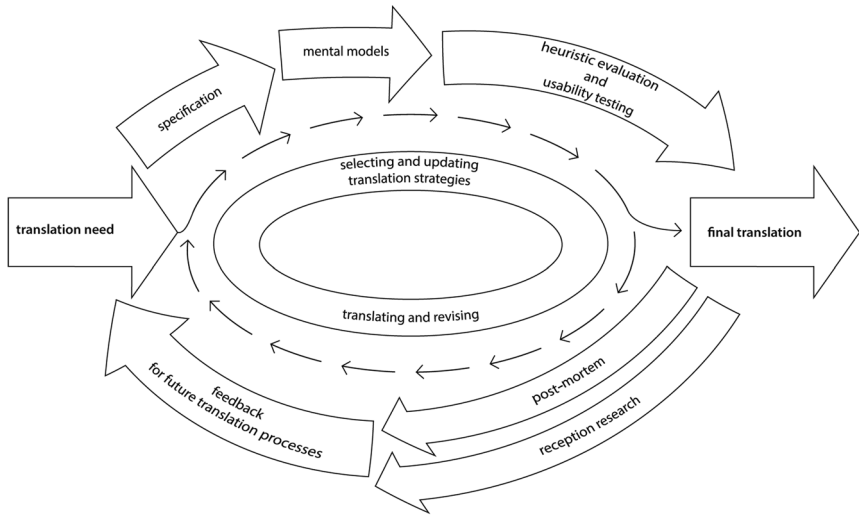


Figure 1.1 The user-centered translation process © Anni Otava

user-centered *design* process, the emphasis is on methods that are used to gather information about users and ways in which this information is brought to software development. Correspondingly, we define user-centered *translation* as follows:

In user-centered translation, information about users is gathered iteratively throughout the process and through different methods, and this information is used to create a usable translation.

In this definition, **iterativity** refers to a cyclical mode of operation, where users are analyzed and usability evaluated via recursive usability research methods. In a user-centered translation process, translation, revision and quality assessment are also done iteratively rather than in a linear fashion. Figure 1.1 demonstrates our model of user-centered translation and indicates the areas covered in this book.

Figure 1.1 contains the following elements:

- **Inner circle: translation strategies, translating and revising**
UCT concerns translation, and it is thus logical that translation itself lies at the heart of the model. The translation process contains a number of iterative evaluation phases, and these shape the translator's work. Translation strategies and solutions are continuously re-evaluated according to accumulating knowledge produced during the project and acquired from previous projects with the help of the tools and methods visualized as the outer circle of Figure 1.1.
- **Translation need**
A fundamental assumption behind UCT is that there is a communicative need for the translation (or, as is often the case, several translations into different languages simultaneously), and thus also a necessity to define and describe

the users and to try to make sure that the translation matches their needs and expectations. In the case of websites in particular, the involvement of end users may begin here, before the actual translation even begins. The interactive nature of the medium allows for feedback systems where users can make requests for particular pages to be translated, which provides an opportunity to assess the real need for a particular language version.

- **Specification**

A detailed written specification is drafted to ensure mutual understanding of the goals of the translation between the stakeholders. The stakeholders also determine the expected usability level of the translation and decide which UCT methods are going to be employed, how and when. This may require negotiations and alignment of views: the specification is not simply a client's wish list, but is to be drafted in dialogue and in mutual respect of the other party's expertise. In cases where some usability measures have already been employed for the drafting of the source text, some information may already be available, and these are to be listed in the specification. In addition, the desired quality level and the agreed measurements to assess it need to be recorded. At the end of the process, the translation is then assessed, not against some ephemeral ideal of a perfect match, but against the specifications and against whether or not the translation's agreed *usability* goals have been reached.

- **Mental models**

Once all existing knowledge of the intended users has been made available at the specification phase, the translator can build a clearer picture of who the users are with the help of various mental models. The methods for mental models include analysis of intratextual reader positions, audience design and the development of personas.

- **Heuristic evaluation and usability testing**

As the translation progresses, its usability is repeatedly assessed, and if necessary, the translation strategies are revised and then re-evaluated by heuristic evaluation and usability testing. Heuristic evaluation is performed by an expert or a group of experts with the help of heuristics – that is, usability guidelines. In usability testing, the behavior of people belonging to the translation's real target group is observed while they use it to perform predefined tasks. The aim is to get information about the usability of the text during the translation process. Both heuristic evaluation and usability testing can also be employed after the translation process has been concluded, but in UCT we emphasize the usefulness of an iterative process that helps to redirect the course of the translation process at an early stage, if necessary.

- **Post-mortem**

Once the entire translation cycle has been completed, the project team members reflect on their performance – namely, they produce a post-mortem analysis of the project. This analysis covers not only the finished text but

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also, and in particular, the process behind it from the negotiation phase to the accuracy of mental models, reliability of usability evaluation, and so on. A documented post-mortem provides systematic **feedback** for redefining and fine-tuning the tools and methods for the next project cycle.

- **Reception research**

The UCT process does not end at the point where the translation is finished and delivered to the client. The finished translation can also be assessed with different reception research methods. The purpose of reception studies in general is to find out how readers understand translated texts or what kinds of translation strategies are most useful and acceptable from the readers' perspective. The findings of the reception studies also give feedback into new UCT processes. Reception research can be employed strategically: feedback from particular user segments can be solicited directly, online or offline, but it is equally important to appreciate unsolicited feedback from the client representatives and end users alike.

The benefits of user-centered translation are especially high in large, cyclical translation processes, because the model is based on iteration: profiling and evaluation tasks are repeated during the process, and after each iteration, user profiles and user needs become more and more detailed. This, in turn, helps the translator to employ the appropriate translation strategies to benefit the user.

Translation strategies themselves are not discussed in this book. It would actually defeat our purpose if we advocated particular strategies or translation styles, labeling some of them user-centered and others less so. The strategies best suited for a particular case always need to be assessed locally, and all major decisions made during the translation process stem from the user, who is always unique and has to be profiled again and again. We also assume that our readers have learned translation skills through other means, and this book offers practical tools to add to their translation competencies, as a way of enhancing their skill set. This focus also leaves out detailed discussions of translation technology, such as machine translation and translation memories. A user-centered translation process may, however, involve many variations of computer-assisted or machine translation, and decisions related to technological choices can be informed by the user-centered thinking we advocate. For example, the decision on whether or not to use machine translation and on how to ensure its usability can be made within the context of the UCT process.

In addition to machine translation, another contemporary trend is to crowd-source the production of a translation. Consequently, user-centered translation might raise connotations of **User-Generated Translation (UGT)**, which refers to ways of harnessing Web 2.0 services and tools to create online content in different languages with the help of volunteer translators (e.g. Perrino 2009; Drugan 2013). We bring up user-generated translation very briefly in Chapter 3 in discussing whether a translation can be considered a product of its own and how the roles of producers and consumers have become increasingly mixed. It is,

however, necessary to emphasize that user-centered translation is not equal to *user-generated* translation. While the initial user research phase of UCT may sometimes reveal such enthusiasm and skills-base among prospective users that it may prove sensible to engage them directly in translating, this is not the assumed or expected state of affairs in UCT. Regardless of whether translation is assigned to volunteers or produced with the help of machine translation, in UCT the professional translators are always in the driver's seat, deciding on what is most advantageous and making sure that agreed usability goals are achieved. In other words, it could be argued that UGT is UCT in its most extreme application.

1.2 Conceptual solutions

In the course of this book, we rely on a number of concepts. We have written this book with translation students, their teachers as well as professional translators in mind. We thus assume that concepts originating from the field of usability research may be new to many of our readers, while concepts from translation studies are more familiar. All central concepts will be defined and explained as they appear in the text, and no previous knowledge of usability research is expected.

The term **user** has particular significance in this book. While translation studies have referred to *target audience*, *reader* or *recipient*, the term *user* has not been a part of the active vocabulary until only recently (e.g. Byrne 2010; Pym 2010). Are we dealing with an entirely new way of thinking, or is *user* only a new designation for something we already know? Do we *use* translations in the same way we might use electronic devices, for example? In this book we suggest that if translation, and translations, can be seen as a means to an end, reading translations can be seen as using. We encourage the *users* of this book to consider for themselves whether and in what contexts they feel the readers of translations can be referred to as users. Because we believe that usability is a beneficial consideration in translation, we argue that *user* can, indeed, be fruitfully employed in many contexts, and that is why we use it interchangeably with other, more conventional terms, such as *audience* and *reader*. However, the use of the different terms in either singular or plural presents a problem. For example, each *user* has unique characteristics, thus making it difficult to profile each user type. Despite this uniqueness, however, in practice users have to be grouped together in one way or another so that designing products and texts is at all possible, and we are therefore also using the plural form. A textual element is also relevant when opting for the plural form: using *they* instead of *he/she* makes the text more fluent and has thus been favored, but at the same time we realize that the singular would sometimes be more appropriate.

1.3 Target groups

In writing this book, we have had three different target groups in mind. To describe these groups, we have used one of the tools presented in this book –

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namely, **personas** (see Section 5.3). Personas are imaginary characters who represent real user groups. They are fictive archetypes of users, representing the needs and characteristics of real users. Personas are used as an aid in designing different kinds of products and services. We have created three personas for this book: Leo, Emma and Julia, who are introduced below (pictures © Elli Oravalnen). After the basic characteristics of each persona, we explain how they came across *User-Centered Translation*, what their interest in the book is, and what we, as authors, hope the book will offer the persona.

LEO: student

Age: 22 years old

Family: No siblings

Neighborhood: From a small town

Education: MA student in a translator training program. Leo wanted to study translation because he had a keen interest in languages and cultures. He was originally interested in literary and audiovisual translation, but has become unsure about employment prospects in those fields. Still, he wants to be a translator and has an open mind about alternative opportunities.



Hobbies: Leo loves reading science fiction in the original language. He is an avid tweeter and keeps a literature blog. He watches a lot of indie films and is a geocacher. Leo works as a volunteer translator for Amnesty International.

Personality: Leo is a quiet type.

Social groups: Leo has a small circle of like-minded friends, who meet regularly to play games, etc.

Leo and UCT:

- Leo came across the UCT book through his studies. It was a set book in a technical translation course, which he took to expand his employment opportunities.
- Leo is familiar with the basic concepts of translation studies and has taken some practical translation courses.
- The UCT book gives Leo the tools he needs in order to become an advocate for the users of translations and helps him find his place in the professional field of translation.

EMMA: teacher

- Age:* 33 years old
- Profession:* Teacher of translation
- Education:* Ph.D. in translation studies. Emma recently defended her Ph.D. thesis on crowd-sourced translation. She has also completed ten ECTS of pedagogical studies.
- Family:* Married with two daughters age 5 and 3. Her husband has a one-man IT company and works from the home office (part-time).
- Hobbies:* Yoga and pilates.
- Work experience:* Emma has four years' experience in teaching translation courses. Occasionally she works as a freelance translator translating a wide variety of commercial texts.
- Personality:* Emma leads a busy life, but she is good at multitasking. Emma has a positive outlook on life. She is not tenured, but she is ambitious as a teacher and wants her courses to prepare students well for working life. Emma is also looking to widen the scope of her research.

**Emma and UCT:**

- Emma is in the middle of a curriculum design process, looking for new course books. She saw the UCT book in a Routledge newsletter.
- The UCT book offers Emma a ready-made package with reading material and assignments for a full UCT course, fresh ideas for research and potential pathways towards usability research as a whole, and avenues for professional diversification, which she can introduce in the translation classroom.

JULIA: translation professional

- Age:* 44 years old
- Profession:* CEO of a small translation agency, which she started ten years ago; it has three in-house translators, two coordinators and a large number of freelancers.
- Education:* MA from a translator training program in 1995, specializing in technical texts, and a minor in business management.



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- Family:* Divorced, teenage daughter.
- Hobbies:* Horseback riding.
- Personality:* The hectic business world has made Julia slightly cynical, but she is fighting against it by trying to stay open to new ideas. She is also curious of present-day translation studies and university offerings, which have changed since her time as a student.
- Social groups:* Julia is an active alumna of her home university. She also visits a nearby university and gives occasional lectures to translation students on professional skills.

Julia and UCT:

- Julia's company is doing well, but the market is competitive and she is thinking of new ways of profiling. Julia wants to be able to produce high-quality products for clients, but she has had trouble finding a reliable assessment system. She wants to cater to good, large customers and build a long relationship with them. She also wants to offer her translators new, meaningful projects. Julia has heard about user-centeredness from customers, and she found out about the UCT book through a Facebook translation group.
- The UCT book brings transparency to the translation process, highlighting what is needed for user-friendly translations; it offers Julia ideas for different kinds of translation products and a different palette of services with added value for clients; and gives new tools to the company translators, motivating them to add to their skill set.

To meet the needs of these personas, we have made the following types of solutions in the book. First, as the personas are familiar with central concepts in translation studies, the main focus is on introducing usability research and its various methods. This focus is manifested in the definition and explanation of central usability-related terms, for example. Second, links are drawn between usability (research) and translation (studies), bringing up fresh ideas and forming the basis for the whole UCT model. Third, in building and arguing for the UCT model, a practical orientation has been a priority: examples are given to illustrate a point, and the assignments encourage the personas to test the ideas and methods presented in the book. Fourth, the book is textually designed so that elements that are especially relevant for each persona are brought up. However, some of the chapters are more relevant to one persona than another.

1.4 Pedagogy

We have designed the structure of the book so that it allows for different types of uses: the book can be used as a traditional textbook which structures a full UCT

module; its chapters can be integrated into practical translation classes or translation theory classes; and it can be used as required reading for a book examination or as material for independent study. At the beginning of each chapter we have compiled a checklist of the key points of that chapter. Central concepts in the text are emboldened for emphasis, and words that are emphasized or used meta-linguistically, as well as the titles of publications, are italicized. Each chapter ends with a list of assignments related to the themes of the chapter in question. The assignments can be used either in class after the chapter has been discussed, or the teacher can just as easily pick assignments mid-chapter to demonstrate and practice a certain theme. In addition, the assignments can be used to support independent study. The assignments vary in terms of type and workload: some are more theoretical and demand extra reading, while others are very practical but at the same time might require more leg work from the student.

We first introduced the UCT model in a Finnish textbook (Suojanen *et al.* 2012). We have therefore had a chance to experiment with UCT. We have taught full modules on user-centered translation with the help of the Finnish-language book and used it as a set book for a book examination. Both we and our colleagues have also used individual tools and assignments introduced in the book in other classes, including practical translation courses. This experience has shown us what a useful model UCT can be, and our experiences have informed the writing of this current book. We want to emphasize that this current book is not a translation of the Finnish book: it is an expanded and updated volume. The sections on user experience and cultural usability, for example, are new, and many other sections have undergone significant changes as our own thinking has advanced, and as feedback and experiences from teaching have guided us to make revisions.

In fact, our process of writing about UCT can be seen as a genuinely user-centered undertaking: the Finnish book was conceived as a part of a pre-existing course on user-centered thinking in translation (studies), and draft chapters were tested by students and teachers – the book’s intended users – while the book was being written. Then, feedback on the Finnish book and our experiences of using it in class affected our choices when writing the English version, and during the writing of the English version we have received constructive expert feedback from our editors. Thus, the project has been truly iterative, and we hope that the publication of the current book is not the end of this process. Therefore, we invite feedback from the users of this book. We look forward to continuously fine-tuning our model, reviewing the methods it contains, and designing even more usable and appropriate tools on the basis of actual users’ experiences.

1.5 Structure

The first four chapters of this book are designed to provide the theoretical background into user-centered translation, and in Chapters 5–9 we examine the practical applications of user-centered translation. The current Introduction outlines the whole book and describes the main idea and characteristics of user-centered

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translation. Chapter 2 defines usability and user experience, the two key concepts in the book. While Chapter 2 mainly relies on usability research, Chapter 3 starts to explore more thoroughly the concept of the user and what it means to use texts in the context of translation studies. Chapter 4 presents the textual elements of usability – namely, legibility, readability, understandability and accessibility.

The core of UCT is the user, and it differs from many other reader-oriented approaches to translation in its concrete tools and methods for taking the user into account in translation. We begin the empirical application of UCT ideas with introducing mental models in Chapter 5: the chapter brings up intratextual reader positions, audience design and personas as methods in profiling the translation's future users. Chapter 6 presents the idea of usability heuristics, which is similar to practices presently used in the translation industry, as translation agencies often employ somewhat similar evaluation approaches. In addition to presenting heuristics from the field of usability research, we also develop specific usability heuristics for user-centered translation. Chapter 7 is devoted to usability testing, focusing on the involvement of real users in reviewing and testing texts: special attention is paid to some key usability testing methods. Chapter 8 offers an overview of reception studies in translation studies, and we discuss how these research methods can also be employed in the translation industry. Chapter 9 discusses the connections between user-centered translation and the contemporary translation industry, particularly the relationships between usability and quality assessment. This chapter also puts user-centered translation to the test: it presents several case studies that investigate the possibilities and restrictions of our model when used in the translation industry. Chapter 10 concludes the book, returning to the beginning and reflecting on the potential utility and usability of the UCT model.