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VERBAL STEREOTYPES

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Our understanding of the manifold aspects of communication has greatly increased in recent years as a consequence of research into linguistic behaviour, one of the stimuli being the interest in the description and explanation of how language users use language for social interaction. To quote Brown / Yule:

> "The analysis of *discourse* is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs... We will adopt only two terms to describe the major functions of language and emphasise that this division is an analytic convenience. It would be unlikely that, on any occasion, a natural language utterance would be used to fulfill only one function, to the total exclusion of the other. That function which language serves in the expression of "content" we will describe as *transactional*, and that function involved in expressing social relations and personal attitudes we will describe as *interactional*. Our distinction, *transactional / interactional*, stands in general correspondence to the functional dichotomies — *representative / expressive*, found in Bühler (1934), *referential / emotive* (Jakobson 1960), *ideational / interpersonal* (Halliday 1970) and *descriptive / social-expressive* (Lyons 1977)" (1983: 1).

One particularly interesting aspect of interactional language use is the investigation of so-called verbal stereotypes (VS) or conversational routines. VS occur in many areas of spoken discourse, not least in the realm of "phatic communication", to borrow a term which was introduced into socio-culturally oriented linguistics by Malinowski (1923) and taken up by Jakobson (1960). Phatic communication is a nowadays widely used term covering those communicative events which fulfil the function of "speech-gestures" or conventionalised discourse-structuring signals. VS, as they are understood here, are not the same thing as phraseologisms of the type occurring, e.g. in resolutions, manuals, cooking recipes, pharmacological enclosures (Beipackzettel), expert opinions (Gutachten), and in the language of advertisements [for a detailed discussion of the heterogeneous concept of phraseology — as a generic term for all sorts of established linguistic configurations — see Burger *et al.* (1981); *cf.* also Daniels (1976/1979)]. Nor are VS identical with idioms which are transactional in character rather than interactional, although interactional utterances may contain a residue of transactional meaning. Schemann is therefore right in distinguishing between idioms in the narrower sense of the word and "pragmatic idioms" which in his view belong to a "theory of social interaction"(1981: 117) rather than to a pragmatic theory [for a discussion of "pragmatic idioms" see also Burger / Jaksche (1973: 58ff) and Roos (1985: 77)].

The essential features of VS are repetitiveness, situation-dependency, predictability, pragmatic (mono-) functionality and interindividual normativity. VS may be regarded as cognitively unambitious stock phrases or set formulas; they reflect socio-psychological modes of behaviour particularly important for everyday linguistic activities of the language user. VS are performed with some specific social purpose in mind; they are not intended to modify their users' model of the world. At the root of VS discourse is a collective knowledge of what kind of utterance we expect in certain discourse situations. This knowledge enables the language user to infer from VS the attitudinal register of his

interlocutor(s) and thus to coordinate strategies of linguistic interaction. Conversely, from a certain discourse utterance we can reconstruct the kind of conversation going on between two or more persons.

Since VS are functionally determined, they permit only a limited degree of variation. In view of this constraint, they represent situation-specific repertoires of formulaic expressions which language users, at least those with a fairly diversified command of their own language, can muster up in a situationally discriminate manner, without leaving personal fingerprints in a discourse, so to speak.

The command of such repertoires of "frozen constructions" (Lakoff 1982: 38) is an essential part of the interactive linguistic competence of a language user, because stereotypic communicative situations occur in each culture. "People conceive of the world in terms of repeatable units" (Young *et al.* 1970: 26f). Hence, the systematic build-up of such repertoires is a central aspect of the linguistic maturation process.

The type of communicative break-down which can happen, if somebody interculturally cannot adequately handle such repertoires, is demonstrated by the story which I borrowed from two German colleagues (Wilss 1982: 203):

> "There was a brief item a year or two ago in an English newspaper about a motorist giving a lift to a young Frenchman who was hitchhiking. When the grateful passenger got out at his destination and thanked his benefactor rather profusely, his thanks were acknowledged by a brief "Don't mention it". The Frenchman, a little nonplussed but willing to co-operate, replied "I won't tell anybody".

The example shows that in everyday communication one must distinguish between semantic and pragmatic meaning. By going back to the literal meaning of "Don't mention it!", the Frenchman showed that he evidently did not know that "Don't mention it!" is nothing but a set phrase which has the function of politely playing down something that somebody has done for somebody else. Such politeness routines can presumably be found in all language communities.

Set phrases, especially if a language community uses them excessively, are often ridiculed by other language communities. There is, e.g., the (invented) story of the Englishman, who late at night arrives at a German hotel. Next morning, when the hotel owner asked him how he had slept, he answered: At first everything was okay, but after 5 a.m., I could no longer sleep because of the many railway trains which passed underneath my hotel room. But this cannot possibly be, retorted the hotel owner, because there is no such thing as a railway line in the neighbourhood of the hotel. There must be, replied the hotel guest, please come along to find out for yourself. At that, the two men approached the hotel room window, and what did they see and hear? Opposite the hotel, a building was going up. In a long row the workmen passed each other the bricks, and everyone hissed: "Bitte schön, danke schön, bitte schön, danke schön...".

The unexpected social plight which one might run into if one is unfamiliar with interlingual conversational routines are revealed by the following example. It occurred in my home town Tübingen, a small-size university town in South Germany. The school, at which I had a job as a teacher-trainee, one day was assigned a female French assistant teacher. She was a very pretty young lady, and of course, the established male task force was only too eager to help her adjust herself in the new environment and kept telling her:

> "Wenn Sie ein Problem haben, kommen Sie ruhig zu mir"
> "Wenn Sie in Schwierigkeiten sind, sagen Sie es mir ruhig"
> Functional translation in English:
> "If you have a problem, do come and see me"
> "If you are in trouble, do tell me, please".

Now in order to understand the danger of a cultural interference one must know that German language cannot easily fall back on phrases introduced by do ("Do come along and see us"). Instead, we use the German equivalent of "quietly" (not in its original meaning, but as a kind of modal particle):

* "If you have a problem, come along and see me quietly"
* "If you are in trouble, tell me quietly".

No wonder, after a while the poor girl was so frustrated that she started crying. Of course, everybody wanted to know what had happened, particularly since everybody had gone a long way towards being particularly nice to the lady. Then, she uttered, her eyes full of tears:

"How can I possibly tell you, when I have a problem, if you want me to be quiet all the time?"

Another example is the frequent confusion of German native speakers of "Thank you" and "No thank you". Asked if one wants another helping, many German native speakers in an English-speaking environment tend to say "Thank you", although they have had enough, i.e. they simply substitute German "Danke schön" (which in German is the equivalent of "No thank you") by "Thank you", thus creating unintentionally embarrassment among their hosts and possibly also among themselves. Conversely, an English guest, who does not know that, in order to be supplied with a second helping, in German he must say "Bitte (schön)" and not "Danke schön", may get up from the table hungry and curse his hosts for their unexpected and unexplainable parsimony.

It is obvious that VS are conducive to playful redirections:

Imagine a young lady asking a young male "Do you have the time?" and then, instead of receiving the expected information, is dodged by the question: "Yes. Do you have the inclination?" [Goffman 1971: 206; for another good example see Kunz (1985: 4)].

If circumstances are favourable, an intentional deviation from a VS may become the source of a new VS, thus, e.g. if a German asked "Wie geht's?", replies with a strong sexual undertone: "Danke, gestern ging's noch!" (in English: "How do you do?" — "Thank you, yesterday I still did pretty well.") Today, this reply is much less ingenious than at the time when it was created.

At any rate, this VS cannot yet be very old, because it is closely related to a certain sexually free-swinging world-view. However, the origin of this VS is probably difficult to establish, as is the case with many new locutions (e.g. in German "Ich bring Dich (noch)" as the colloquial German equivalent for the more formal English expression "I shall see you off the premises"), because they may have been in use a long time before they were felt to be new VS.

So much in the way of introductory remarks on our subject-matter. I would now like to turn in more detail to the characteristic features and the communicative function of VS.

The existence of VS has long been known to linguists, but for many decades, in contrast to the concept of creativity, they have treated VS as a fringe phenomenon unworthy of systematic investigation. De Saussure's work contains some fleeting references to "locutions toutes faites" (1916). Malinowski discusses VS within the framework of his concept "context of situation" (1923). Jespersen devotes some attention to VS under the heading of "formulas and free expressions" (1924), and Pike (1967) sees the relevance of VS in connection with questions of the interplay between human behaviour and cultural institutions (for details see Coulmas 1981: 18ff).

The systematic investigation of VS, partly within the framework of contrastive sociolinguistics, has been under way only in the last decade, notably under the influence of the pioneering work of linguists such as Fishman (1972) and Labov (1972). Obviously VS are complex sense units, which are stored as a whole in the memory of the language user. In different words: As a message conveyor and message recipient, the language user does not handle VS analytically, in the form of bottom-up and top-down processes; he does not compose or, for that matter, decompose VS in interrelated sequences of lexical and syntactic operations; rather, he activates them within the framework of associatively organised modes of communicative behaviour. This confirms Hörmann's hypothesis that the linguistic memory of the language user contains not only elementary lexical entries, but also higher-level linguistic units which are handled, in the case of VS, en bloc in a rather mechanical, habitualized fashion (1978). VS are communicative slot-fillers which spare the recipients the trouble of performing "long strings of interpretation on ... utterance(s) they hear" (Stubbs 1983: 5). Hence, Brown/Yule refer to VS as "prefabricated *fillers*" (1983: 17) which fulfil highly standardized interactional functions [see also Goffman (1967) and Coulmas (1985)]. Thus, "Hello", "Good bye", "Have we met before?", "Should I know you?", etc. are deeply entrenched socialized linguistic items which permit dialogue participants to engage in mutually recognizable discourse maneuvers.

Thus, VS are a kind of discourse servo-mechanisms in the context of "social facilitation" (Allport 1924) in which utterance, situation, knowledge and linguistic action are closely intertwined. VS are always a joint practice and, as such, come under the heading of co-operativeness (Grice 1975). They are the manifestation of a type of speech act requiring the observance of conformative communicative roles. VS reliably allow continuous monitoring operations in an ongoing discourse.

In accomplishing such discourse roles, a language user must, in certain circumstances, be able to read between the lines of other persons' utterances by keeping an eye on the situational factors because of the sometimes rather wide distance between surface forms and underlying social meaning. Thus, e.g., "You must come again", uttered on the point of departure of a guest, does not necessarily mean that the host/hostess really wants to see him/her again. A diametrically opposed interpretation is also feasible, or it might be a more or less non-committal verbal farewell gesture which both the host and his guest may have forgotten after a few seconds, because it does not contain a proposition which compels either side to adopt a certain follow-up strategy.

From all we intuitively know about VS we can assume that VS represent a well-organised communicative subsystem for interpersonal contact situations. VS serve to relieve what might be called the "situational matrix" of communication. Whoever makes use of VS has no desire of linguistic originality; rather, he relies on transindividual productive and receptive mechanisms. He does not tap the resources of stylistic variation. The use of VS, as established speech patterns, is motivated by the desire for the smooth, economic, coherent functioning of discourse based on a mutually acknowledged norm system (Young *et al.* 1970: 177) which favours stereotype ways of expression as a handy tool because of their social rule-orientedness. As a result of their predictive potential, VS, as indicated, do not require analytical decoding or hermeneutic interpretation; they are embedded in mono-causal interactive conditions. VS are the accumulated condensation of experiences which one must not regard as mental dispositions in the sense of generative innate ideas. Rather, they are culture-specific phenomena which play a significant role in the socialisation process of a language user [the same is true of "smile-routines" (Young *et al.* 1970: 195)]. He learns VS in the course of his language acquisition process, thereby gradually internalizing them as abstract social formulas and making them part

and parcel of his future discourse competence. They are noticeable in saying farewell, in small talk, telephone conversation, in asking directions, in giving or evading answers, in request/thanks constellations, during shopping tours, at the ticket counter, during medical consultations, and in many other areas of everyday communication. VS, as instantiated frames on the basis of situational evidence, fulfil a communication-guiding and communication-structuring function; they determinate to a large extent "how the flow of conversation is maintained or disrupted" (Stubbs 1983: 7). VS serve as a communicative calculus, as a "social grammar" which makes sender and recipient aware of the social impact and prestige of convergent discourse strategies. VS are apt to strengthen the "Wir-Gefühl" ("we-feeling") (Wenzel 1978: 22); this "Wir-Gefühl" is indicative of a tendency "to belong". Hence it is no surprise that even language users with a relatively restricted code are cognizant of the communicative importance and the moral pressure exerted by VS. They tend to regard the non-availability of VS as a major impediment to their social integration.

The power of VS is revealed by the fact that the use of certain VS is not related to a certain communicative situation in a general way, but in a specific way, requiring the fulfilment of additional conditions. E.g., we know of VS which can only be used in the interaction of adults, but not in the interaction between adults and children. If children use, advertently or inadvertently, certain VS in talking to adults, they become guilty of deviations from a norm, i.e. they commit communicative blunders which may have unpleasant consequences ranging from raised eyebrows to painfully derisive laughter.

This is to say that ignorance of linguistic conventions — and the same goes for non-linguistic conventions — may entail more or less harmful sanctions. I remember, e.g., a ball of the German-American Society in Munich, in the course of which a German guest stepped on the toe of an American lady of rather high social standing. Instead of making an excuse by using the cliché "I beg your pardon", rather unfortunately he reacted by saying "Never mind!". The lady virtually stiffened, looked at her dancing partner icily and turned abruptly away from him without saying a word. Not realizing that he had become guilty of a social faux pas, he was completely flustered and let his host into his mishap. The host managed to convince the lady that no harm was meant and that the poor guy had simply failed to solve a conversational coordination problem, owing to the fact that he had not enough experience in activating an adequate VS.

Another rather delightful story happened when I was riding in a tram from Sheffield Main Station to Sheffield University in 1951. In order to understand the situation one must know that Sheffield lies in Yorkshire and that Yorkshire people finish practically every sentence by adding "love". I was together with a rather arrogant German female student, who, like me, was in the U.K. for the first time and obviously was unaware of the fact that "love" is no more than a highly stereotype message-ending signal. When the tram conductor gave her the ticket, he added "That'll be two pence, love". To his great consternation, she retorted: "I don't think we have met before".

The examples which I have presented make it clear that we must regard VS as highly institutionalized ways of expression which are embedded in a stimulus/response feedback. VS function as a carefully measured communicative technique which, in view of its pragmatic stability, can contribute a lot in the way of initiating, carrying on and finishing everyday communication (e. g. in greeting rituals). Monolingually, VS normally do not cause collisions; as unexpendable parts of the collective linguistic memory of a linguistic community they are indicative of the priority of socially mediated linguistic experience over personal communicative strategies. Hence, VS can serve as a protective gadget; those who use VS maneuver, metaphorically speaking, in relatively untroubled waters with an optimal input/output ratio.

One should not forget, however, that, like any linguistic inventory, VS are subject to change. We must see language as a process of continuous creation and decay, and we must be aware of the fact that there is no such thing as a VS inventory which could perfectly match the language use at any moment. As a consequence of social structural shifts, established VS may go out of use and may be replaced by new ones. In the course of the emancipation of the female sex in Germany in official correspondence, the address "Sehr geehrte Herren!" ("Sir") has given way to "Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren!" (Madam, Sir"). Other set phrases typical of previous centuries with their rigid hierarchical stratification of society have disappeared from the scene, at least in democratic societies, because they are no longer in line with our social world view (Lebenswelt). It would be worthwhile to make a survey on the VS inventory of modern labour- and consumer-oriented society in order to find out which changes have taken place in recent times and to what extent they reflect a new social consciousness.

Of course, not all social groups activate the same repertoire of VS. Thus, "Could I have some more water, please?" and "Water, please!" are probably indicative of the different social standing of the respective person (for another illuminating example see Stubbs 1983, 72). Hence, a detailed study of VS would have to consider the aspect of to what extent social groups identify themselves or can be identified by the use of certain VS. It can be assumed that VS mirror a specific social value system which denounces anyone as an outsider who is not familiar with such language games and is not able to react accordingly. As such, VS, particularly the more sophisticated ones, confirm the rolerelatedness of phatic communication; sender and receiver take for granted that his of her interlocutor will adhere to mutually acknowledged expectation norms.

VS are also very useful if somebody wants to play for time. Somebody may delay, by using linguistic "square passes", the building-up and completion of a conversational frame by interpolating set phrases, such as "you know" or "if I come to think about it", or "on second thought", etc. Such dilatory tactics can be observed, e.g. in a discussion following a lecture or in an interview situation, especially if the interviewee is confronted with several interview partners who are eager, by using collusion strategies, to corner him. In a case like this, an interviewee may develop a counter-strategy by trying to slow down the game and thus gain cognitive leeway. VS constitute in a way linguistic material helpful in attempts to compensate the aggressivity of an interlocutor, to enable the interviewee to adapt himself to the argumentative thread of his opponent and to conceive of dialogue strategies with clearly distinguishable phases of attack, defence and counter-attack.

In establishing contacts between persons who do not know each other, the selection of the appropriate stereotype may be of great social relevance. E.g. the set phrases: "I would like you to meet Mr. X" or "Have you met Mr. X already?" are, hierarchically speaking, much more neutral and inoffensive than set phrases such as "I would like to introduce Mr. X to you!", because the person introduced is, according to our social norms, invariably lower in social rank than the person to whom one is introduced. Of course, a spiteful host, who likes to play the role of a social trouble-maker, may deliberately choose the wrong set phrase if it is — or has been in his/her mind — to settle a score or to insult somebody for whatever reason.

Such insults may, since they occur in public, inaugurate deeprooted enmities. Whoever decides to play the game should therefore make sure that he or she does not fall into his or her own trap and provoke an unexpected counter-move, such as the following:

> At a posh party one lady says to another: "What a wonderful dress; you are wearing it today already for the second time". Back comes the "afterburn": "What a lovely material, my dear, you should have had a dress made out of it".

On the other hand, VS can contribute towards ironing out differences of opinion, e.g. by using semi-fixed set phrases "Concerning this point, I tend to disagree with you", or "This is a point on which I would be inclined to disagree with you", formulations which can be regarded as (successful) attempts to maintain a social equilibrium by signalling readiness for compromise and thus to allow the discussion partner to save (his/her) face (Goffman 1967).

VS occur, as indicated, in many areas of everyday life; they constitute, as it were, an important segment of a social hierarchy which tells people how to behave linguistically and to comply within an established communicative scenario. Coulmas (1981) mentions greeting formulas, honorifics, introduction rituals, regrets, sympathy, condolences, gratitude, excuse, congratulations, etc. Expressions of this kind contain a high degree of idiomaticity and would, within Chomskyan paradigm, be regarded as utterances which cannot be incorporated in a generative-transformational framework.

VS are in a way preordained formulations for which, despite surface structure contrastive features, functional equivalents can be found in many languages in view of comparable discourse situations. Here are a few examples English-German:

Please hold on — *Bitte bleiben Sie am Apparat / Bitte legen Sie nicht auf*
Fasten seat belt — *Bitte anschnallen*
Extinguish your cigarette — *Löschen Sie Ihre Zigarette*
Would you mind... — *Würden Sie bitte...*
You know... — *Wissen Sie...*
I'll be right with you — *(Einen) Augenblick bitte*
I regret to inform you... — *Ich bedauere, Ihnen mitteilen zu müssen.*
There is no denying the fact... — *Man kann nicht leugnen...*
Take care of yourself — *Pas (gut) auf Dich auf*
I don't think we have met before — *Ich glaube, wir kennen uns noch nicht*
Have a nice weekend — *Schönes Wochenende*
I beg your pardon — *Wie bitte*
Pardon (me) — *Verzeihung*
May I have your attention, please — *Darf ich um Ihre Aufmerksamkeit bitten*
Any more fares please — *Noch jemand ohne Fahrschein*
You are sure, it is not too much trouble for you — *Macht es Ihnen auch bestimmt nicht zuviel Mühe*
This reminds me... — *Dabei fällt mir ein...*
Would you like some tea — *Möchten Sie gern (ein Tasse) Tee*
By the way... — *Übrigens*
Did it ever occur to you — *Haben Sie je(mals) daran gedacht...*
Next please — *Der Nächste bitte*
May I interrupt you — *Darf ich Sie unterbrechen*
Have I kept you waiting — *Habe ich Sie warten lassen*
Can you hear me — *Können Sie mich verstehen*
Long time no see — *(Ich habe) lange nichts von Ihnen gehört*
How do you do — *Guten Tag* (under no circumstances: *Wie geht es Ihnen* which in German is acceptable only after the first phase of the greeting ritual is completed)
The patient is as well as might be expected in the circumstances — *Dem Patienten geht es den Umständen entsprechend gut*

You know you're not supposed to do that — *Du weist, das Du das nicht tun solltest*
Who is that speaking — *Wer spricht bitte*
Why don't you... / Why don't we... — *Wollen Sie (nicht)... / Wollen wir (nicht)...*

Let us now turn to culture-specific set phrases which are difficult if not impossible to reproduce in another language. Strangely enough, there is no German equivalent for "Sir", "Yes, Sir", "No, Sir". "Mein Herr", "Ja, mein Herr", "Nein, mein Herr" sound artificial in German; sometimes we can say, at the expense of a shift in style level: "Hallo, Sie" (Hello you). Another difficulty is "I thought you would never ask", as a reply to the apologies of a host who has noticed that inadvertently he has not offered his guest a drink.

Similarly, there are typical German set phrases:

Das ist ja `noch schöner* (≠ *Das ist ja noch `schöner)
Wenn schon, denn schon
Wenn schon...
Da sage ich nicht nein
Das gibt's doch nicht
Wer sagt's denn (= *Wer sagt denn, dass es nicht geht*)
Hals- und Seinbruch
Bist Du noch zu retten?

(Na), was machen die Künste (somewhat eccentric for "How do you do?"). For *Gutten Appetit* there is an equivalent in French and Italian "Bon appétit" and "Buono appetito". In English, one might, if anything, say: "I hope you'll enjoy your meal". If somebody renders *Guten Appetit* by "Good appetite" (which is almost invariably the case in English announcements in German Intercity trains), the result is a way of expressing which Richards / Sukwiwat have thus commented:

> "In studying conversational discourse, a distinction can be made between grammatical competence and conversational competence. Grammatical competence describes a speaker's knowledge of the underlying systems of vocabulary, morphology and syntax which is required to construct grammatical sentences in a language. The sentence is the unit of distribution for grammatical competence. Conversational competence however is defined not with reference to the sentence, but to the utterance. This refers to the speaker's knowledge of how speech acts are used in social situations. There are many sentences in a language which are not used as utterances" (1982), 1)

They go on arguing:

> "Two languages may share a similar routine but use it differently. For example *thank you* may be used to accept an offer in English, but to decline one in Malay. English *thank you* may be used to express gratitude, but in Japanese the equivalent routine may not sound sincere enough, leaving the speaker with the urge to add *I'm sorry*" (1982: 4).

In a semiotic matrix, one can systematize the culture-specific differences between VS in different languages, thereby distinguishing between syntactic, semantic and pragmatic equivalence (a more detailed matrix can be found in Coulmas 1981: 116):

	Syntax	Semantics	Pragmatics
Good morning	x	x	x
Guten Morgen	x	x	x
Good evening	x	x	x
Guten Abend	x	x	x
Good night	x	x	x
Gute Nacht	x	x	x
Good afternoon	x	x	x
**Guten Nachmittag*	x	x	o
Good appetite	x	x	o
**Guten Appetit*	x	x	x

Sometimes the existence of a VS in one language and the non-existence of a functional correspondence in another language entails borrowing processes within the framework of interlingual acculturation, e.g. English-German:

This is a good question — *Das ist eine gute Frage*
What can I do for you (opening of sales talks) — *Was kann ich für Sie tun*
Can I help you (opening of sales talks) — *Kann ich Ihnen helfen*
Precisely — *Genau*

Such borrowing may lead to the semantic re-interpretation of set phrases in the receiving language. Thus *Was kann ich für Sie tun?* and *Kann ich Ihnen helfen?* have eliminated, probably under the massive influence of film dubbing, the traditional German set phrases *Sie wünchen bitte?* or *Kann ich Ihnen behilflich sein?*. Of course, set phrases of the type *Was kann ich für Sie tun?* and *Kann ich Ihnen helfen?* have existed in German for a long time, but they could be used only in situations where somebody was really concerned about the well-being of his neighbour and wanted to assist him in concrete predicaments.

As indicated, for the translator, and perhaps even more so for the interpreter, the knowledge of actually preprogrammed discourse patterns is a vital component of his translational competence. He must be aware of the fact that culture-universal VS invariance [e.g. "All societies have rules for good manners" (Young *et al.* 1970: 172)] is complemented by culture-specific (ethnographic) variance. A society's language "... consists of whatever it is one has to know in order to communicate with its speakers as adequately as they do with each other and in a manner which they will accept as corresponding to their own" (Goodenough 1964: 37). Hönig/Kussmaul (1982: 9) have pointed out that "Good bye" and *Auf Wiedersehen* are semantically not identical: "Good bye in Lake Placid" appeared in huge neon letters when the Olympic Winter Games ended in Innsbruck in 1976. Millions of TV watchers could admire this truly olympic error. Obviously the translator had been given the task of translating *Auf Wiedersehen in Lake Placid* into English and he performed his task by simply looking at the words *Auf Wiedersehen*, without taking account of the situation in which Germans say *Auf Wiedersehen*. If the translator had taken the situation into consideration, he would have realized that *Auf Wiedersehen* can only be used if another meeting (reunion) is being

planned or not. The conditions for using "Good bye" are different. As soon as it is obvious that the farewell covers only a certain period, and if it is explicitly stated when and where the reunion is supposed to take place, the use of "Good bye" is impossible. Thus, "Good bye in Lake Placid" should have been replaced by something like "See you again in Lake Placid".

Another example: Kanittanan (1982: 1) comments on an encounter between a Thai student and his English teacher:

> "Good morning, Mr. Johnson, where are you going?"

Now the Thai student is not really interested in the whereabouts of Mr. Johnson. He simply asks him "Where are you going?" because this cliché is the Thai functional equivalent for "How are you?". Although the Thai student speaks English, socio-culturally he speaks Thai. He is not aware of the fact that not all language communities respond in comparable situations in the same manner.

> "Cultures define social situations differently. Although there are many social situations that are common across the cultures such as meals, weddings, and funerals, there are others for which no direct equivalence exists in the other culture, such as "at the pub" in Britain, "attending a Buddhist ordination ceremony for a young man" in Thailand, or "visiting elders and family members on Chinese New Year" in Chinese societies. Presumably routines are associated with these and many other culturally specific events that are particular and unique to the culture in which they occur" (Richards / Sukwiwat 1982: 3).

The existence of culture-specific variance is, of course, no principal impediment to situationally adequate socio-cultural interlingual translation, provided the translator is cognizant of the functional correspondences in the source language and the target language communities.

> "In view of the vast differences in both culture and language, some persons have concluded that ultimately translating is impossible... If one means by such a statement that the absolute reproduction of all of the meaning of the original text can not be accomplished by translating, then of course translating is impossible. But translating is only one aspect of communication, and even within a single language absolute equivalence in communication is never possible. The same is true between languages, so that absolute identity of meaning can never be accomplished whether in intralingual or interlingual communication; nevertheless, effective equivalence of meaning can be communicated both within a language as well as between languages... One important reason for the possibility of interlingual communication is the fact that human experience is so much alike throughout the world. Everyone eats, works, is related to families, experiences love, hate, jealousy, is capable of altruism, loyalty, and friendship, and employs many facial gestures which are almost universal (laughing, smiling, blushing, frowning). In fact, what people of various cultures have in common is far greater than what separates them from one another. Furthermore, even within an individual culture there are usually more radical extremes of behaviour and attitude than one finds in a comparison of so-called normal or standard behaviour between cultures" (Nida 1982: 9).

Summing up it is perhaps worthwhile pointing out that there is a tendency towards over-routinization of communication by the excessive use of VS, all the more so since it may be fashionable to display a wide range of up-to-date patterns of social speech (Wackernagel-Jolles 1971). This does, however, not impair the usefulness and efficiency of VS in everyday conversation. VS comply with the general human inclination towards "minimax strategies" which we can also observe in non-linguistic behaviour (Lippmann 1949). VS are, on the whole, an indispensable part of human behaviour. They constitute not a creative, but a re-creative linguistic activity which normally requires not much

problem-solving capacity. In view of their social impact they are an important part of intra-culturally and inter-culturally oriented studies which must be taken up and carried on by researchers in first-language acquisition, foreign-language learning and in translation pedagogy.

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