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Fundamentals of Translation

Clear and concise, this textbook provides a non-technical introduction to the basic and central concepts of translation theory and practice, including translation briefs, parallel texts and textual functions, cohesion and coherence, and old and new information. Colina focuses on the key concepts that beginning students of translation, practicing translators, language students and language professionals need to understand about translation practice. Numerous exercises (discussion, group and individual) at the end of each chapter and "Practice" activities throughout each chapter allow students to self-assess their practical understanding of chapter topics. In addition, examples, figures and text extracts from a wide variety of world languages contextualize chapter material and produce a lively and accessible narrative. Suitable for non-specialists with no prior experience of translation, it will also be of interest to practicing translators, language students and language industry professionals who wish to gain a wider and up-to-date understanding of translation.

Sonia Colina is Professor of Hispanic Linguistics in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Arizona, where she teaches linguistics and translation. The author of *Translation Teaching: From Research to the Classroom* (2003), she has also published numerous articles in edited volumes and journals, including *Target*, *The Translator*, *Babel*, *Linguistics* and *Lingua*. She is on the editorial board of *Translation and Interpreting Studies* (TIS) and on the International Advisory Board of *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*.

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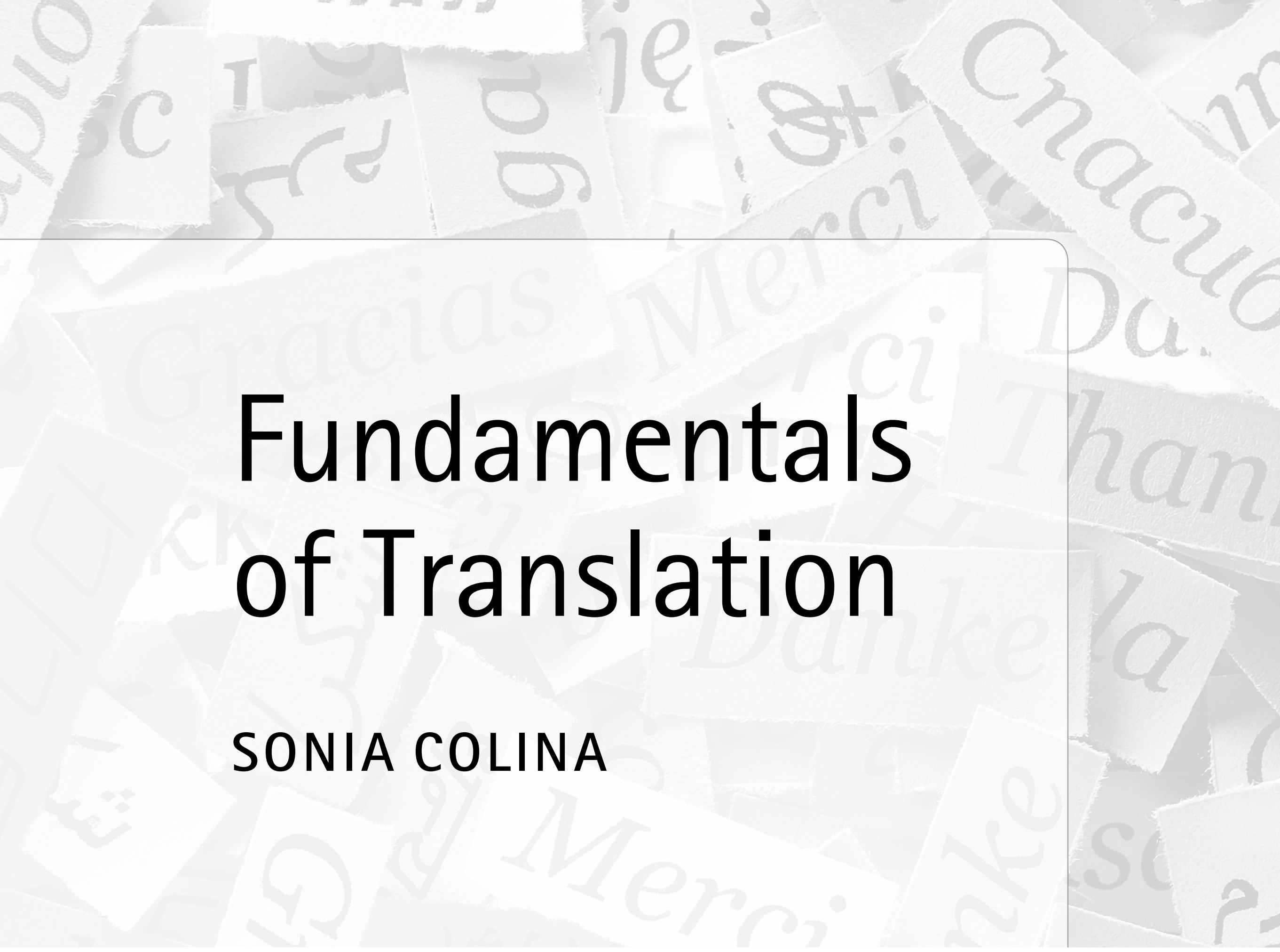
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Fundamentals of Translation

SONIA COLINA

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107645462

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First published 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Colina, Sonia.
Fundamentals of translation / Sonia Colina.
pages cm
ISBN 978-1-107-03539-3 (hardback)
1. Translating and interpreting. I. Title.
P306.C65 2015
418′.02–dc23
2014042930

ISBN 978-1-107-03539-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-64546-2 Paperback

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Preface

Purpose of this book

Overall, *Fundamentals of Translation* serves the purpose of disseminating up-to-date, fundamental knowledge about translation in an appropriate format for a non-specialist, broad readership.

More specifically, the purpose of this book is threefold. It intends . . .

1. . . . to offer a basic, easy-to-read introduction to concepts essential to translation practice.

Practitioners, language and translation students, and professionals in related fields (managers of translators, communication specialists, etc.) need to acquire a general understanding of basic translation concepts without having to read through pages of translation theory and scholarship or publications geared toward specialists or graduate students. This need for knowledge remains mostly unmet, as evidenced by the disconnect between the current understanding of basic translation concepts among translation scholars and that possessed by translation practitioners, students and language professionals. Many language professionals and students still refer to deeply entrenched and outdated views of language and of translation, at a time when research in translation has seen unprecedented growth and advances. It is our opinion that this situation is due not to a lack of interest but to the dearth of publications that make this information accessible to wide audiences, who often feel overwhelmed and discouraged when confronted with books that are too long, too theoretical and too complex for their purposes. Along similar lines, many believe that theory and other conceptual elements are irrelevant to practice, mostly because they have been presented in a manner that is too complex and too far removed from their reality.

2. . . . to reach out and introduce translation, in an accessible manner, to readers who may not intend to become translators but who work in fields that can benefit from informed knowledge about translation.

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3. . . . to lay the ground for a better understanding of translation among language students and other language specialists, disseminating basic concepts and dispelling myths about translation.

The idea for this volume originated, in part, while teaching applied translation courses (e.g., medical, legal, business translation). The students, at a major research university in the United States, were often employed as translators and language professionals but had had little formal training. While the courses were mostly practical, and the program had a separate translation theory course (which the students may or may not have taken), it was obvious that some basic, common theoretical framework was needed. *Fundamentals of Translation* is based on some of the theoretical modules the author developed for those courses. These modules were also necessary for the eminently practical and professional, online certification developed by the author with funding from an Arizona Board of Regents grant. Additionally, *Fundamentals of Translation* draws on presentation materials created for professional translators, teachers and bilinguals who tested the Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) tool designed for *Hablamos Juntos* (see www.hablamosjuntos.org). Online training for the use of this tool required understanding of some translation/linguistic concepts with which these professionals were not always familiar.

The idea for this book also has its origins in the author's observations as a professor, professional translator and small-company owner. Throughout the years, it has become clear that many language professionals and students could benefit from some basic introduction to translation concepts. Students in large language programs also need to understand and use professional/communicative translation in their courses.

It is uncontroversial that translation means many different things to many different people. Beginning translators and students come to the field with various misconceptions that affect their work. Lay audiences tend to have a profound misunderstanding of translation as practiced by professionals today. Other language professionals have also developed their own views. *Fundamentals of Translation* originates out of the frequent interaction with these professionals and students, and out of the subsequent realization that some common ground among language students and other language specialists is truly needed. The book attempts to do this by disseminating basic translation concepts and dispelling myths about translation among a broad base of readers.

Topic

Fundamentals of Translation covers basic concepts of translation necessary for translation practice and teaching. The criterion used for the selection of concepts is their centrality to the principled practice of translation, keeping in mind the needs of a general audience. Students of translation often need to know, for instance, about translation briefs, parallel texts and textual functions, cohesion and coherence, old and new information, etc. The book also includes basic concepts of language and linguistics that are relevant for translation practice. By means of definitions, short explanations and simple examples, *Fundamentals* addresses and develops the answers to such questions as:

- What does a beginning student of translation, focused on practice, need to know conceptually?
- What does a practicing translator, in particular if he/she does not have a formal education in translation, need to know to be able to operationalize, formalize and discuss his/her practice?
- What does the language student interested in understanding translation (as vs. grammar translation, i.e., translation as a language exercise) need to know?
- What do language professionals, who may not want to become translators, need to know to understand translation as a form of cross-linguistic communication?

Fundamentals of Translation can also be conceptualized as a basic college-level textbook about translation concepts and about the content knowledge needed to practice translation in the twenty-first century. It is not intended, however, as an overview of all topics in the field; in fact, comprehensiveness will be sacrificed at times in order to attend to the needs of a wide, less specialized audience.

In describing what this book is about, we believe it will be useful to explain how it differs from current books on the market and what makes it unique.

1. *Fundamentals of Translation* is a book in the area of applied translation studies and translator education, rather than translation theory or translation studies per se.

As we will see in Chapter 1, translation studies is the research and scholarly field that studies translation and related phenomena. Books like Munday (2012), Gentzler (1993), (2001) and others are about translation studies. Their goal is to introduce translation studies research to researchers, graduate students or advanced undergraduates who plan to do research in the field. Many concepts and ideas included in *Fundamentals of Translation* have their origins in the work of translation scholars, and can be found and studied in depth in the translation studies literature, including the aforementioned textbooks. Yet, *Fundamentals* differs from those books in that it is written for readers whose primary goal is to learn about translating and interpreting; in reading *Fundamentals* readers will learn concepts that originated with translation studies, but they will not necessarily have to know about how this knowledge developed and how it came to be. *Fundamentals* attempts to bridge the divide between the scholarship and theory of translation, on the one hand, and the practice, on the other, by developing applied knowledge and concepts that are pertinent to the practice.

A good parallel can be established with Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and foreign-/second-language textbooks. Although the latter depend on knowledge in SLA, they do not teach students about SLA, but rather about language learning/teaching. *Fundamentals of Translation* is, of course, slightly different, in that it does not focus on translation practice (language books are about learning/practicing the language), but on the concepts behind the practice.

Another example to illustrate the differences between a translation studies textbook and *Fundamentals of Translation* concerns the field of general linguistics: Graduate-level textbooks in linguistics tend to summarize theories (generative, structuralist, functionalist) and specific data analyses. They also teach students how to do linguistic analysis. By contrast, an undergraduate introductory textbook on linguistics (cf. Hualde et al. [2010]) does not introduce theories, but describes and explains content and current knowledge (what phonemes, allophones, speech acts, rewrite rules, phrase structure rules, etc. are). *Fundamentals* attempts to do for translation something similar to what Hualde et al. (2010) does for (Hispanic) linguistics.

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2. *Fundamentals of Translation* is a book about basic concepts of translation, rather than a manual of translation techniques, strategies or tips.

Therefore, it is not meant to teach the practice of translation directly but to explain basic concepts that often remain unexplained in practice-oriented courses. In other words, the focus is on conceptual issues that facilitate the teaching, understanding and practice of translation. The accompanying exercises are meant to help with the understanding of these concepts by providing for a more interactive approach. They are not intended to offer translation practice.

3. *Fundamentals of Translation* is language-neutral (i.e., it is not language-specific), and it has a non-literary focus, although the concepts presented are relevant to all translation activity.

Audience and courses

Fundamentals of Translation is for a broad readership, including translators and student translators, but also can include language students, teachers and professionals who are not translation specialists and/or who may not plan to pursue translation as a career. It relies on a view of translation as a form of mediation, a cross-linguistic communicative pursuit, which is relevant, at least at the general, non-specialist level, to all language professionals.

In more specific terms, *Fundamentals* is primarily for:

- undergraduate students enrolled in courses/certificates in translation, in particular for those who have not had major exposure to translation studies and/or to the theoretical concepts behind the practice
- translation practitioners/professionals
- bilinguals
- language learners
- language teachers
- linguists and linguistics students
- professionals in language-related or linguistically involved fields (communication specialists, business professionals, health-care professionals).

No specific level of proficiency in any particular language is required, other than a basic understanding of language and language structure in general.

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Fundamentals of Translation explains basic concepts of translation to all of the above groups in what we believe is the right proportion to address their shared needs. In so doing, this book attempts to cover a common conceptual ground shared by these constituencies, while making the case that translation (in the broader, less specialized sense presented here) is relevant and pertinent to the professional and academic lives of all these readers.

For (beginning) students of translation, *Fundamentals of Translation* provides a basic framework for discussion of translation processes and products, obviating the need for extensive and complex readings on theory; the book helps language learners and teachers to integrate translation concepts into their language and teaching experiences through a wider and up-to-date vision of translation, allowing them thus to learn about this related activity and possible career paths. Under this view, translation is introduced earlier in the language-learning curriculum, because it is not considered as the exclusive realm of balanced bilinguals. Bilinguals and professionals, already in possession of language skills or translation experience, will find in the book the conceptual framework that will help them to inform their practice and their language competence. Similarly, professionals in language-related or linguistically involved fields (communication specialists, business professionals, health-care professionals) will acquire a broader, more flexible understanding of their professions and of the concepts at the intersection with other language careers/professionals. Finally, linguists and linguistics students will find in this book what they need to understand translation as a communicative activity, as opposed to a language or glossing exercise. Overall, *Fundamentals* bridges the divide between theory and practice in translation by *translating* theoretical and empirical findings in translation studies and relevant fields to the day-to-day concerns of the described readerships.

Courses for which the book is intended

A significant portion of the intended readership for this book consists of independent readers seeking self-learning. However, another large group consists of students enrolled in a variety of university/collegiate courses. In this context, *Fundamentals of Translation* is intended as a companion textbook (i.e., generally complementing other books, language-specific manuals or

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customized course packets) for a variety of translation, language and linguistics courses. For illustrative purposes, we include some general descriptions of the subject areas and specific examples of course titles and areas:

1. Translation practice courses, which are part of a university language program or of a translation curriculum (e.g., minors, majors and certificate sequences), offered in a face-to-face, hybrid or online mode. These are predominantly practical courses in need of a basic, straightforward, theoretical and conceptual context to frame the practice. The textbook could be used for entire course sequences (certificates in translation, practice-oriented degrees, translation concentrations in language departments, etc.), to accompany language-specific manuals or translation packets, etc. Some examples are:
   - Introductory, survey courses: e.g., *Introduction to translation*
   - Subject-specific translation courses: e.g., legal translation, technical translation, medical translation, business translation, etc.
   - Language-specific translation courses: e.g., Spanish translation, French translation, Italian translation, etc.
2. Non-translation specific courses, i.e., those in which translation is covered as a related activity, not as the main focus of the course. For these, *Fundamentals* works as a complementary, short textbook that introduces a topic not normally covered in the core texts. These courses are the equivalent of third- and fourth-year undergraduate courses in the United States and parts of Europe. Many of them have such titles as:
   - Introduction to German/Spanish/Japanese linguistics (etc., language-specific)
   - Introduction to Linguistics (general, non-language specific)
   - Introduction to applied linguistics
   - Service Learning
   - German/Spanish/Japanese, etc. for Professional Purposes
   - Advanced German/Spanish/Japanese, etc.
3. Non-traditional and industry-teaching formats, such as professional workshops (one–two-day workshops on translation), independent learning, etc.

Teachers using *Fundamentals* as a supplemental textbook for a course should be aware that, in order for the book to work as intended, it must be integrated with

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practice. Teachers need to address crucial concepts without shifting the focus to the theory. The conceptual base must be present, but unobtrusive and at the service of practice.

One possible way to achieve this is to have the students do the reading on their own and then refer to relevant concepts during practice ("Do you remember...?", "How does this relate to X concept we read about?"). Also, once the concepts have been introduced by means of the readings, they can be integrated into classroom terminology and the lesson structure. For instance, let us consider a translation assignment that includes a translation brief. Students could be asked to read the relevant pages in *Fundamentals of Translation* (in place of a classroom lecture on translation briefs). This would then allow the teacher to refer to the brief in the course and to structure translation activities around it. Another possibility is to devote some time to the discussion of the readings and their relevance to the course and practice in the classroom. This, however, should not take more than 10–15 percent of class time.

Fundamentals of Translation includes exercises (discussion, group and individual) at the end of each chapter, as well as exercises with commentary throughout the chapter. Discussion and group exercises are meant for in-class readers. The in-chapter exercises are designed to make the reading more engaging. *Fundamentals* also contains multiple examples, figures and texts.

It is also possible, depending on the type of class, to use only relevant sections and chapters of the book. For example, a language class interested in introducing simple translation tasks as communicative exercises may consider Chapters 1 and 2 for outside reading, and set aside the rest of the book.

Features of the book

- Straightforward, easy-to-read explanations of essential and up-to-date concepts
- Guided in-chapter exercises with commentary
- End-of-chapter exercises (individual, group, discussion)
- Answer key
- Multiple examples and figures
- Suggestions for further reading
- Chapter summaries
- Online exercises

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Organization/structure

1. The term "translation": Concept, definition and usage

Chapter 1 reviews various definitions of translation, addressing the difficulties involved in trying to define "translation." This chapter also provides an overview of types of translation, such as overt and covert translation, communicative, dynamic and formal translation, grammar translation, interlinear translation, etc. Equivalence and equivalence types are discussed in connection with the notion of translation, as well as the problems involved in trying to come up with an a priori definition of the term. Translation is situated within the wider context of cross-cultural communication, the language industry and language for specific purposes. In addition, the chapter reviews various types of translation-related activities (e.g., editing, proofreading for translation, machine translation, etc.) and translation competencies.

2. The functions of translation: Functionalism

Chapter 2 reviews functionalism (a.k.a. Skopos theory, from the Greek *skopos* meaning "purpose") and some basic notions associated with it, while also explaining how to apply them in translation practice and discussion. It addresses related topics, such as: situational features and how they affect both monolingual and translated texts; the translation brief and translation norms; changes in situational features, and how they influence and guide translation decisions; the "lifecycle" of a commissioned translation, etc. As in other chapters, examples and illustrations accompany the presentation.

3. The functions of translation: Pragmatics

Chapter 3 explains notions of pragmatics relevant for translation practice, such as speech acts, differences between grammatical functions and pragmatic functions, etc., always considering the implications for the practicing translator or person interested in the practice.

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4. Texts and translation

Chapter 4 covers aspects of texts and textual linguistics that are useful for the practice of translation, such as: differences between sentences and texts; translating sentences vs. translating texts; cohesion and coherence, markers of cohesion and coherence, cross-linguistic differences in cohesion and coherence, and translation implications. Additional topics are textual functions (text types) and genres. Armed with these basic concepts, readers are given some tips on textual and parallel text analysis and shown how assistive texts (background texts, parallel texts) and online corpus tools can be used for translation tasks.

5. Reading and translation

Chapter 5 summarizes what reading as an interactive process means for the craft of the translator, including such concepts as background knowledge and its relation to specialized texts, new and old information, word meaning as activation of a potential meaning within a particular text, and the translator as a reader.

6. Social aspects of translating

Chapter 6 goes over notions of sociolinguistics that have implications for translation. Some examples are: register, dialectal variation, the nature of language change and variation, prestigious varieties vs. stigmatized ones, translating in multilingual societies, etc.

7. Translation quality

Chapter 7 reviews some of the difficulties involved in evaluating translations. It presents a flexible, customer-defined and easy-to-apply view of quality and explains the basic notions involved. The chapter offers some suggestions for translators and teachers on how to address the topic of quality in a systematic way, which is also crucially related to principles discussed in previous

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chapters: translation brief, source text, target-text norms, functional adequacy, specialized contents, etc. As in other chapters, the content presented attempts to dispel existing myths about the topic of quality, translation and language. It shows students how to review their own translations and monitor their quality on the basis of the translation brief and textual considerations, and how to use customer (and other types of) feedback to improve their performance in a principled way.

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Acknowledgements

Numerous people have played a part in the writing of this book, and I would like to express my gratitude to all who directly or indirectly contributed to it.

In particular, I need to thank the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the College of Humanities at the University of Arizona for a sabbatical semester in the fall of 2012 that allowed me to jump-start this book. I am also extremely grateful to Sue Ellen Wright (Kent State University) for very extensive comments and for trying out sections of the manuscript in her classes. Tasha Campbell provided invaluable, detailed editorial comments as well as a gentle hand, for which I am very thankful. For help with examples, I thank Claudia Angelelli, Brian Baer, Ana Carvalho, Joseph Casillas, Sarra Said and Paul Sundberg, and Joseph Casillas for his extraordinary assistance with the index.

I would also like to express my most sincere gratitude and appreciation to the graduate students in my *Introduction to Translation Studies* class in the spring of 2014. They graciously endured the homework and continuous references to "the book manuscript" and provided a class environment that served as my refuge away from the daily grind of academic life.

Finally, I thank six anonymous reviewers and the editorial team at Cambridge University Press for helpful feedback and guidance.

This book is dedicated to Eric, Mariana, and Adrian.