



## NATURALNESS AND TRANSLATION

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### Introduction

Associations can be revealing in trying to fix our understanding of elusive concepts such as 'naturalness'. On the one hand, 'naturalness' is often associated with 'fluency', as in the following internet advertisement for a Polish translation agency:

'Tatoo (*sic*) translation bureau: only native speakers of English and Polish are employed for translations. Ensures **fluency and naturalness** - perfect for advertising' (*emphasis added*)

On the other hand, 'accuracy' is often implied as some kind of opposition, or tension-inducing factor which needs to be resolved if a 'natural' translation is to be produced:

'This course provides for regular weekly practice in handling material with a wide range of different styles, registers and subject matter. The texts to be studied will present both stylistic and syntactic difficulties and will be drawn from a variety of French sources; in working on them, emphasis will be laid (*sic*) on the **accuracy and naturalness** of the finished product.'

University French-English Translation module description on the WWW (*emphasis added*)

To make our task of understanding naturalness in the context of translation more concrete, let us consider the following translations of the final sentence of a Lufthansa information leaflet, distributed at Frankfurt airport during the 1992 public-service strike:

*Wir würden uns freuen, wenn Sie diese Geduldsprobe mit uns bestehen.*

- T1: We would appreciate your patience with us at this time.
- T2: We would be very glad if you would stand by us during this test of our patience.
- T3: We would be happy if we overcome this test of patience.
- T4: We would be grateful if you remained patient with us.
- T5: We would be pleased if we could get through this trying time together.
- T6: We would very much appreciate it if you could remain patient with us throughout these circumstances.
- T7: We would appreciate your patience with us at this time.
- T8: During this difficult period, we ask for your patience and co-operation.
- T9: We hope that you will overcome this test of patience with us.
- T10: We would be grateful if you could bear with us.
- T11: We hope that you will be patient and bear with us at this difficult time.
- T12: We would ask you to have patience and please bear with us.
- T13: We will all be glad when this trying time is over.
- T14: Thank you in advance for bearing with us during this difficult period.

Translations T1 - T13 are all student translations, but most translation teachers would probably agree that T14 (the published version) is the most 'natural' translation, given the genre and the purpose of the translation, but how can this choice be convincingly justified?

'Naturalness' lies in the area beyond formal and propositional equivalence, blurring imperceptibly at some point with what has been called 'taste'. Its apparent lack of objectivity, compared, say, to the evaluation of grammar or vocabulary, leads to difficulties in grading students translations, in justifying these grades and in attempting to provide remedial feedback. Clearly, it is not good enough to say that it 'doesn't sound right': this simply invites the rejoinder: 'but it sounds all right to me!' That road leads nowhere and is of no help to the student translator in developing an insight into the way in which they translate. In many cases, the lack of 'naturalness' can be traced to something in the source text (ST) which is still inappropriately transparent in the target text (TT): a particular word, a cohesive device (or absence of it), a collocation, some distribution of information, a particular text-typological convention. In other words, 'naturalness' pervades many levels of the translation from the word to the text itself.

In this paper I would like to address some of the issues which impinge on our understanding of 'naturalness'. While on the one hand it has been associated negatively with cultural assimilation from a literary perspective, on the other hand, it has been linked positively with the 'localisation' of informative texts and the products to which they relate from a commercial perspective. After a brief presentation of some views on naturalness in translation, the following issues will be addressed: authority, ideology, text type, genre and prototypes or parallel texts. Finally, two case studies are presented, considering also some pedagogical issues.

### **Some views on 'naturalness' and translation**

What I have chosen to call a traditional view of naturalness is positive and evaluative (rather than descriptive), regarding it as one of the main criteria of a good translation, often associating its absence with a negative influence of the ST (often described as translationese). 'Naturalness' may be indicated in a number of ways.

Tytlar's early idea that 'the translation should have all the ease of original composition' (Tytlar 1907:9) seems to have something to do with naturalness, i.e. that the text should read like an original TL document, an interpretation which recurs frequently:

Tytlar (1907:9, originally 1791, *emphasis added*)

- I. That the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.
- II. That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original
- III. **That the Translation should have all the ease of original composition**

The idea survives 150 years into the mid-twentieth century with Nida's proposal that a translation should have 'a natural and easy form of expression' (Nida 1964:164):

Nida (1964:164, *emphasis added*)

1. making sense

2. conveying the spirit and manner of the original
3. **having a natural and easy form of expression**
4. producing a similar response.

For Newmark, 'naturalness' is one of the so-called 'levels' at which a translation can be carried out (alongside what he calls the textual level, referential level, and the cohesive level) (1988:24ff). His view is that informative and persuasive texts should be translated at this 'level', with the focus on naturalness in the TL. Translations of expressive/authoritative texts should, on the other hand, he goes on, reflect the degree of naturalness in the original text. He attempts to define naturalness as follows:

'Natural usage comprises a variety of idioms or styles or registers determined primarily by the "setting" of the text, i.e. where it is typically published or found, secondarily by the author, topic and readership, all of whom are usually dependent on the setting.' (1988:26)

In Newmark's view, the provenance of 'unnatural translations' is what he calls 'interference':

'[...] unnatural translation is marked by interference, primarily from the SL [source language] text, possibly from a third language known to the translator, including his own, if it is not the target language' (1988:27).

A similar, but more elaborated and descriptive approach is suggested by Dressler (1990), who argues in terms of marked *versus* unmarked translation. By 'marked' he understands 'more marked than, dispreferred or less natural than'; by 'unmarked' he understands 'less marked than, preferred or more natural than'. As far as markedness in relation to translation goes, he claims that choosing to translate an unmarked option in a ST into an unmarked option in the TT, or a marked option into a marked option, is unmarked. If the translator chooses to translate marked with unmarked, or *vice versa*, this is, according to Dressler, a marked translation. If this is done without justification, then he claims that the translation is 'inadequate'. As justifications for a marked translation strategy, Dressler cites grammatical or stylistic patterns of the TL or the specific purposes of the translator. Dressler's view is summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Dressler's (1990) view of marked and unmarked translation strategies

| <b>ST ± marked</b> | <b>TT ± marked</b> | <b>Translation ± marked</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| +                  | +                  | -                           |
| -                  | -                  | -                           |
| +                  | -                  | + <sup>a</sup>              |
| -                  | +                  | + <sup>a</sup>              |

Note:

a: 'inadequate' if change without justification

### **Authority**

Both Newmark's proposal that naturalness as a translation goal be related to text type ('when the main purpose of the text is to convey information and convince the reader, a method of translation must be "natural"', 1988:19), and Dressler's that an unmarked translation retains the 'naturalness status' (my term) of the original, but also allowing for a marked solution, beg the question of who decides what is 'natural'? Who has the authority to decide what is 'natural'?

(or fluent or unmarked) in what Newmark calls the ‘setting’ of the text, given that there are many acceptable varieties - sociolects, dialects and even ideolects - and registers of the target language? One way of approaching the problem is to think in terms of dichotomies, such as speaker of the standard variety (+authority) *versus* speaker of a non-standard variety (-authority), or speaker of an acrolect (+authority) *versus* speaker of a basilect (-authority), or native speaker of the TL (+authority) *versus* non-native speaker of the TL (-authority). In LSP translation, knowledge of the subject field and its special language assume considerable importance:

Table 2: Authority and naturalness

| <b>+authority</b>               | <b>-authority</b>                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Speaker of the standard variety | Speaker of a non-standard variety |
| Speaker of an acrolect          | Speaker of a basilect             |
| Native speaker of the TL        | Non-native speaker of the TL      |
| Subject-field expert            | Subject-field novice              |

However, if the ‘setting’ requires the use, say, of dialect in the TT, then a speaker of the standard variety will have no authority, unless s/he is bidialectal. In the classroom, the authority relationship is usually assumed to be teacher (+authority) *versus* student (-authority). But as teachers we also know that the borderline between creativity and error is sometimes a thin one. What may be acceptable from a creative writer, may be rejected from a non-native speaker, from whom a greater degree of conventionality is usually expected. So what might have been the ESL teacher's reaction to Dylan Thomas' collocation 'a grief ago'? Perhaps s/he would have helpfully explained that the natural collocater (which can be clearly justified semantically) for the temporal preposition 'ago' is a temporal (durative) NP, even in the poetic genre.

So the authority to decide what is 'natural' may derive from several different sources and is relative to the task in hand. In fact, naturalness turns out to be a very diverse notion in its realisations.

Naturalness implies accessibility, but accessible to whom? A good illustration of the diversity of what is considered 'natural' is the number of translations undertaken of the Bible. While the translation of sacred texts may in one view be ST-oriented – ultimately in the case of the Koran meaning that no translations of the original Arabic may normally be used for religious purposes – some recent translations of the Bible place considerable emphasis on the ‘naturalness’ of the TT, pursuing the path of dynamic equivalence after Nida and following in the vernacular tradition of Wycliffe and Tyndale. Retranslations highlight the range of possibilities covered by 'naturalness' and seem in a number of cases to be motivated by social recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity in the recipient community. In acknowledging this diversity, the aim is to reach groups of readers who may have felt 'excluded' by previous translations. These new versions (actually, not always retranslations) may focus on issues of gender (e.g. *The New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition*) or particular social groups as defined by race (e.g. *The Black Bible Chronicles*) or may simply aim to use a modern idiom, as does *God's Word*, a new translation of the Bible which makes a claim to be written in 'natural American English': 'The meaning is expressed in natural American English by using common English punctuation, capitalization, grammar and word choice' (quoted by Leman from the preface to the translation, <http://www.mcn.net/~wleman/godsword.htm>). Reviewing the translation, Leman agrees that this version contains many natural (idiomatic) translations such as that of James 5:12b:

*Gods Word*

'If you mean yes, say yes. If you mean no, say no.'

which he argues is more natural (in relation to modern American English) than the hortative structure in the *New International Version*:

*New International Version*

'Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "no", no.'

Elsewhere, however, Leman judges many translations in *God's Word* to be unnatural, as in John 3:3:

*Gods Word*

'I can guarantee this truth'  
(for the Greek *amen, amen*)

More natural, in his view, are the following:

*Contemporary English Version*

'I tell you for certain'

*New Century Version*

'I tell you the truth'

*Today's English Version* (also known as *Good News Bible*)

'I am telling you the truth'

Following Mildred Larson, Leman suggests that 'community checking' (as a kind of post-editing addition to the review stages already built into the translation process) would have helped to highlight the remaining 'unnaturalness'. However, it is hard to envisage exactly who such a community would consist of, since 'modern American English' is an abstraction. As has been pointed out in a comment on the many versions of the Bible which are now available: 'our world is split into many subcultures, each with its own linguistic and reading habits and shifting wavelengths of comprehension' (<http://www1.christianity.net/ct/7TC/7TC030.html>). In some cases, versions may actually be edited versions of a previous translation rather than a new translation. P.K. McCary is, for instance, described as the 'author' (*sic*) of *The Black Bible Chronicles* and *Rapping with Jesus* (<http://www.elca.org/co/news/990129.htm>). Matthew 5 v28 is 'translated' as follows:

*Rapping with Jesus*

You brothers go round peeping and pointing at the sisters, thinking, I aint doing nothing wrong, cuz I aint down with her, think again. Whether for real or in your mind, its all the same to the Almighty cuz it was done in your heart.

*Authorised version*

I say to you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

An equally clear example of what we might call 'niche translation' (or more accurately 'niche versioning') is *The Tabloid Bible*, a best-selling version published in 1998 by N. Page with the major publisher HarperCollins. The following headings (<http://www.fireandwater.com/books/catalog.asp?id=8043>) are illustrative:

*The Tabloid Bible*

'Five thousand fed with loaves and fishes? Miracle? Or just very thinly sliced?'

'Would You Adam & Eve It! First Humans Expelled From Garden'

TOWER OF BABEL COLLAPSES:

'Xxyshhibbothuth mi varg,' says suddenly incomprehensible builder.

These highly targeted 'versions' of the Bible are in fact reminiscent of the strategies of multilingual copywriting and of localisation. The former is often practised as a more viable alternative to translation when dealing with advertising copy. The latter aims to adapt and translate software applications (linguistically and technically) in a way which is 'linguistically and culturally appropriate for a particular local market' (Esselink 1998:2). In these cases, the 'authority' is the 'consumer' (aka the 'reader') not the author, and in marketing, consumers are specific, targeted groups. Such strategies can in fact be viewed as the ultimate way of 'domesticating' a ST which it is thought will have little resonance with the target readership, a strategy which Venuti (1995) has discussed primarily in relation to literary texts. He sees the issue of naturalness in an ideological light in which a TT-orientation is critically viewed as a means of diminishing the value of the ST in the context of a dominant TT language and culture.

### **'Naturalness' and the 'invisibility' of the translator**

In his review of translations into English from the seventeenth century on, Venuti (1995) discovers a rather more uniform and traditional view of naturalness. He argues that fluency in this context is the dominant criterion used to review literary translations. His analysis of reviews of translated books (1995:4) indicates a perception that 'fluency' is characterised by being 'modern' (not archaic), 'widely used' (not jargonised), standard (not colloquial), consistent in its variety (not mixing, say, British and American English). He summarises as follows:

'Under the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work "invisible", producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems "**natural**", i.e. **not translated**.' (Venuti 1995:5, *emphasis added*)

This so-called 'domestication' of foreign texts (aiming at readability and therefore consumability on the market) is criticised by Venuti as 'insidious' since it is disguised by the very invisibility of the translator (1995:15-17). The 'domesticating method' of translating is defined as 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to dominant cultural values in English', whereas a 'foreignising method' is described as 'an ethnodeviant pressure on those [dominant cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text' (1995:81). Venuti cites Nida's definition of functional or 'dynamic equivalence' as a good example of the domesticating method developed against a background of Bible translation: 'A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture' (Nida 1964:159). Venuti seems implicitly to disagree with Nida that accuracy is consistent with

dynamic equivalence (1995:21-2), since for Venuti, accuracy seems to be associated with a 'sending-the-reader-abroad' strategy (cf. Schleiermacher, Venuti 1995:19-20). Venuti's analysis is not restricted to the literary canon but extends also to Freud's writing, which he claims has, in translation, been 'assimilated' to the 'dominance of positivism in Anglo-American culture so as to facilitate the institutionalization of psychoanalysis in the medical profession and in academic psychology' (1995:27).

But Venuti's examples still come primarily from literary genres and human sciences, a point he himself acknowledges (1995:41). In fact, Venuti's view is not inconsistent with Newmark's that 'naturalness' is an objective for informative and persuasive text types whereas the translation of an expressive text should reflect the **degree** of naturalness in the ST. While acknowledging that literary translators have a choice whether to bring the author back home or to send the reader abroad, Venuti argues that the history of English-language translation shows the status quo to be the former, i.e. domestication. This situation of optionality (in principle at least) is contrasted with the situation facing the translators of non-literary texts: 'the choice of whether to domesticate or foreignize a foreign text has been allowed only to translators of literary texts, not to translators of technical materials' (1995:41). He goes on to argue that communicative requirements in our increasingly globalised world are paramount, meaning that translations of international treaties, legal contracts, technical information, and instruction manuals, need to be 'immediately intelligible' and 'fluent' (a characteristic which he criticises in literary translations into English even as 'violent' *vis à vis* the foreign language and culture).

But at some point this rather too neat division between foreignization and domestication in the context of literary and non-literary texts or between expressive and informative or persuasive texts begins to break down when we consider particular genres (*Textsorten*).

### **Genre and naturalness**

Let us start by looking at an excerpt from an informative text type, namely a translation of a car user's manual reported in Sørensen 1994:22:

***Always remember the following when about to tow!***

*Unlock the steering wheel when about to tow!*

*Bear in mind regulations concerning maximum permissible speed when towing!*

*Also bear in mind that the servo assistance provided by the footbrake does not function when the engine is not running! So you have to depress the brake pedal 3 or 4 times harder than is the case when the engine is running!*

*And if the car has power-assisted steering, then the steering will feel considerably stiffer.*

***Special for automatic transmission:*** *The gear selector should be in position N, the transmission must be properly adjusted and the oil level correct (see page 49).*

*Maximum permissible speed: 30 km/h (20 mile/h). Max permissible towing distance: 30 km (20 miles)!*

The corresponding Danish text reads as follows:

***Husk dette ved bugsering!***

*Lås ratlåsen op således at bilen kan styres!*

*Tænk på at den efter loven højeste hastighed ved bugsering er 70 km/h!*

*Tænk på at fodbremsens vakuumhjælp ikke fungerer når motoren står stille!*

*De skal således træde 3-4 gange så hårdt på bremsepedalen!*

*Hvis bilen har servostyring er styretøjet betydeligt tungere når motoren står stille!*

***Specielt ved automatgearkasse:*** *Gearvælgeren skal være i N-stilling, gearkasse skal være rigtigt justeret og olieniveauet skal være korrekt (se side 49).*

*Højeste tilladte hastighed: 30 km/h!*

*Længste tilladte strækning: 30 km!*

It is clear that the English version is not an original English text or at least, was not written by a NS of English (cf. for instance, the use of punctuation - particularly the use of exclamation marks with imperatives, the phrasing *Bear in mind...*, incorrect abbreviations, etc.) and that the Scandinavian 'shines through'. The text is clearly not 'natural' or 'domesticated', as would be appropriate to this genre and its purpose to both inform and instruct, according to Venuti. The following, although it too may not have originated in English, is a better exemplar of the genre, observing English conventions of punctuation, phrasing and layout, i.e. it is more 'natural'.

***TOW TRUCK TOWING***

*When towing your vehicle, local regulations for towing must be followed. Incorrect towing equipment could damage your vehicle. To assure proper towing and to prevent accidental damage to your vehicle, NISSAN recommends that you have a service operator tow your vehicle. It is advisable to have the service operator carefully read the following precautions:*

***Towing Precautions***

*Turn the ignition key to the "OFF" positions and secure the steering wheel in a straight ahead position with a rope or similar device. Never place the ignition key in the "LOCK" position. This will result in damage to the steering lock mechanism.*

*When towing with the rear wheels on the ground, release the hand brake.*

*Attach safety chains for all towing.*

*NISSAN recommends that your vehicle be towed with the driving (front) wheels off the ground as illustrated.*

In fact, 'domestication' does seem entirely appropriate for the translation of informative technical texts which have the same purpose in the target culture as in the source culture, particularly when the need for certain localising changes is taken into account, such as traffic regulations. Moreover, consumer confidence is unlikely to be increased by humourously awkward documentation where the original language and culture 'shine through'. More culturally-bound texts, however, such as legal documents do typically need to 'take the reader abroad', since in the words of Jakobsen (1994a:54): 'The aim of legal translation [...] is typically to enable target culture readers to understand the meanings which the source text has in the legal system to which it belongs'. Rayar (1988:542, cited in Trosborg 1994 and Hjort-Pedersen 1994) expresses a similar point of view: Legal translation does not entail translation into a different legal system, but into another language (an alternative view is expressed by

Hönig, 1997:19-20, and a modified view by Trosborg 1994 and Hjort-Pedersen 1994). It has been argued, for instance, that a SL-oriented or 'foreignising' strategy for the translation of certain legal texts draws attention to the fact that the two legal systems are different, thereby helping the TL-reader, e.g. an English lawyer acting on an English translation of a Danish will, to avoid false assumptions of similarity (Hjort-Pedersen 1994).

For texts which are to be domesticated (cf. our car owner's manual) or localised, a certain authority may be identified in prototype models (Neubert & Shreve 1992:130ff) or in so-called 'parallel' (cf. Göpferich 1998) or 'comparable' (Gavioli & Zanettin 1997) texts, or 'community testing' (cf. Larson 1984) may be carried out. However, there is no prototype or parallel or 'community' for a text which is to be foreignised. In literary translation, it is the translator's job (*pace* Newmark) to judge the degree of naturalness of the ST, and to interpret how this can be creatively represented in the TT, if the translation strategy is 'unmarked' in the sense of Dressler. For LSP texts, however, expressivity or creativity is not usually the issue: legal texts in particular such as contracts and wills are likely to be highly conventionalised and regulated in each language. Neither is the choice one of ideology: it is a functional question of how the text can best fulfil its purpose in the TL culture. In this context it is the translator's job to find a way of sending the reader abroad without losing him or her all together, which may mean establishing some links with the TL culture, particularly those which relate to the perspective of the targeted reader/reader group. In her discussion of the translation of Danish wills into English, Hjort-Pedersen (1994), for instance, proposes that the felicity conditions of speech acts can be to determine whether particular speech acts are translated with a ST-orientation (if the conditions differ) or a TT-orientation (if the conditions match). Put another way, a 'natural' translation is only made where the English and the Danish legal systems overlap.

## Case studies

Having reviewed some of the issues which may influence views about naturalness in translation (as a general goal, as an evaluative standard, in relation to particular readerships, to ideological purpose or to text type/genre), let us now look at two specific examples of German-English translation which focus on different aspects of our topic. In both cases we have an eye to pedagogical considerations in the context of translation into the second language, a situation which in 'many parts of the world [...] is a regular and accepted practice' (Campbell 1998:12)<sup>1</sup>. Both examples deal with informative texts, in which consensus seems to favour a 'domesticating' translation strategy, to use Venuti's term. The first example compares native speaker (NS) performance with non-native speaker (NNS) performance (using student translations), concluding that good NNS translations may fulfil the informative function more adequately than some NS translations, although they lack a degree of naturalness. The second example explores naturalness at text level, focussing on an aspect of cohesion (using a corpus of published translations), concluding that a wide range of strategies for retaining the cohesive links of the ST in the TT (in terms of functional perspective) are available, where grammatical and communicative constraints are in tension.

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<sup>1</sup> The data discussed in the following sections are taken from German-English translations. This language pair/direction is not normally one where we could expect demand to exceed supply, with NNS translators filling the market gap. However, according to one survey conducted in the mid-1980s, professional practice varies greatly between countries. Translators in Germany, for instance, are much more likely to translate into languages other than their mother tongue (65%) than translators in the UK (16%) (Grindrod 1986).

'Unnaturalness' in translated texts is, as we have seen, often associated with some kind of 'transfer' from the ST, whether this is conscious, e.g. in a 'foreignising' translation of a literary ST, or unconscious, e.g. where influence from an informative ST is functionally inappropriate. In the second case, the resulting unnatural ST is often the work of NNS of the TL. However, according to the purpose of the translation, naturalness or domestication may not be a priority, e.g. where a translation is required for information purposes only and where, say, corporate image is not at stake. In Dressler's terms, such a translation strategy would be marked (unmarked ST -> marked TT) but would be justified and therefore 'adequate'. However, much of the work carried out by NNS cannot be categorised as 'for information only'. We must therefore look for ways in which competent NNS translators can attempt to fill the 'naturalness gap'. We return to this following discussion of our two examples.

### **Some comparative NS/NNS translation data**

The data are taken from four translations by two native speakers and two non-native speakers of English<sup>2</sup>. The comparison demonstrates that in most respects other than naturalness, competent NNS translators can outperform weak NS translators. The source text is 'Die Kirchensteuer bleibt', from the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 4.01.94 (cf. Appendix A). The text is anonymous and informative, and reports on a disagreement within the German government about the continuation of 'church tax', levied by state tax offices on behalf of the two biggest churches. The second half of the text, which was the homework set, describes the historical origins of church tax. The translation task was to produce a TT for the European page of an English (UK) broadsheet. Church tax is not a concept in the UK, and therefore unfamiliar to the English NSs, leaving them without a clear frame of reference for translation problems at both the conceptual and the terminological level. While the NNSs of English had a conceptual grasp of the topic, their knowledge of English terminology was largely lacking. The two best NNS translations and the two weakest NS translations are presented in Appendix B.

The poor NS translations are characterised largely by serious mistranslations of the ST at the level of sentence structure, tense errors, and spelling and other orthographic errors. Nevertheless, individual sentences often read rather fluently or 'naturally'. The errors of poor comprehension of some aspects of the ST syntax lead to translations make no sense in relation to the whole text, thereby endangering its coherence, but which in themselves are misleadingly fluent:

*Die Kirchensteuer wurde in der Weimarer Verfassung von 1919 reichsrechtlich garantiert. Dort hieß es, Religionsgesellschaften, die Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts sind, seien berechtigt, aufgrund der bürgerlichen Steuerlisten nach Maßgabe der landesrechtlichen Bestimmungen Steuern zu erheben.*

*As of 1919, the Church Tax was guaranteed legal status throughout the German Reich. That is to say, it was justifiable to levy taxes to raise revenue for religious societies, which are open to everyone and fulfil the stipulations of regional legal requirements, appearing on civil tax lists.*

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<sup>2</sup> The analysis focuses on a small number of translations produced as homework by the best non-native speakers of English (mother tongue German) and the weakest native speakers of English attending a German-English translation class at the University of Surrey. The course concerned, an introductory one, dealt with the translation of a range of German texts into English; topics covered included politics, society, economics, issues of current interest; the texts were often journalistic, but not exclusively so, ranging from informative through instructive to persuasive in type. The aim of the class was to introduce students to some of the variables in translation and to explore ways in which translation decisions can be seen as relative rather than absolute. In other words, the class was a kind of reorientation away from the rather different objectives of translation pedagogy in the context of foreign language proficiency training.

By contrast, the good NNS translations are characterised by what might be called a lack of 'naturalness', but not by misleading translations at the propositional level. The 'unnaturalness' in such translations is often the result of lexical transfer from the ST (arguably from the SL), resulting in odd collocations, too many abstract nouns or infinitives instead of gerunds, and cognates from an inappropriate register. Student A, for instance, translates *Inkasso* in the phrase *für das Inkasso* with an abstract noun: 'by the collection', whereas a gerund would have been more natural: 'for collecting the tax'.

The good NNS translations are characterised by a greater number of lexical errors of various kinds than those of the NS of English, as one might expect. The following terminological and collocational problems were noted, for instance:

*'legal public corporations' ('public law corporations')*

*'tax rates are coupled on both kinds of income tax' ('tax rates are linked to both kinds of income tax')*

*'of all taxes to be paid' ('of all taxes to be levied' or 'raised')*

In conclusion, we can say that the bad NS translations are less successful in certain crucial respects than the good NNS translations. However, pedagogically the 'unnatural' aspects of the good NNS translations may be hard to remedy, since lexical patterns or terminology (which are the predominant errors in the good NNS translations) cannot usually be generalised as a grammatical rule can be. In other words, the pay-off for the student for learning, say, a particular collocation is not as great as that for learning a pluralisation pattern or a word order rule. Improvement might then be expected to be very slow. Some alternatives to NS revision, particularly where the NS may not have the subject knowledge necessary to be a 'speaker' of the LSP in question, will be considered following the discussion of our second example.

### **Naturalness and cohesion**

Apart from exhibiting certain difficulties with terminology and collocations, the student translations show that the NNS, including the two in our sample, tended to transfer the cohesion pattern of the German ST to the English TT in the extract below (*emphasis added*) where the sentence-initial adverb *dort* ('there') caused problems:

*Die Kirchensteuer wurde in der Weimarer Verfassung von 1919 reichsrechtlich garantiert. Dort hieß es, Religionsgesellschaften, die Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts sind, seien berechtigt, aufgrund der bürgerlichen Steuerlisten nach Maßgabe der landesrechtlichen Bestimmungen Steuern zu erheben.*

In contrast to most of the NS of English, both NNSs understand the cohesive nature of the link between the first and second sentence: *dort* co-refers with *in der Weimarer Verfassung* ('in the Weimar Constitution'), but they fail to express it naturally in English. Both maintain the sentence division and use the expression: 'There it was said' (*Dort hieß es*). Although comprehensible, this is a marked structure in English. Good NS translations overcame the problem posed by sentence-initial *dort* by using a relative clause to combine the first and second sentences: 'in the Weimar Constitution of 1919 which stated that ...'

In translating between German and English, the beginnings of sentences can be tricky, as our example illustrates. German's more flexible sentence-initial word order in declarative clauses - in relation to the more fixed grammatically-based Subject-Verb-Everything Else (SVX)

word order of English - is well known (cf. for instance, Kirkwood 1970). Provided that an element is 'known' (i.e. thematic), sentence-initial objects of all kinds, adjective phrases, and even past participles are unmarked in German. Consequently, by reordering elements German is able to comply more easily with pragmatic constraints arising from what is known to the speaker/hearer and what is new, whereas English often has to restructure in order to maintain both the thematic structure and the unmarked S-V order. Baker (1992:171; 172) has suggested that translators - not necessarily NNS translators - tend to resolve 'the tension between syntactic and communicative functions in translation' by 'abandon[ing] the thematic organization of the source text' in favour of the syntactic constraints of the TT. She attributes this to a lack of awareness of available strategies. Implicit in her argument is the assumption that it would be better **not** to abandon the thematic organisation of the ST, but the problem is how to represent it in a way which is 'natural' in the TL.

Let us explore Baker's suggestion in the context of English LSP translations from German. The focus of the discussion will be on contrasting German ST sentences in which the thematic sentence-initial element is not the grammatical subject, with the translator's choice in English TT sentences. To this end, a small parallel corpus of LSP texts and their published translations was compiled (Rogers 1998). It comprises the following:

**Table 3:** Corpus design

|                          | TEXT TYPE                          | DOMAIN                             | NO. OF WORDS (ST) |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>OSRAM lamps</i>       | product description for customer   | technical (domestic lighting)      | c.4,480           |
| <i>OLTP-Middleware</i>   | magazine article for professionals | information technology (software)  | c.1,320           |
| <i>Investment Policy</i> | bank internal report               | economics (banking and investment) | c.20,000          |

Each ST was read 'manually' and examples were identified in the ST of declarative sentences in which the initial element was **not** the grammatical subject but apparently thematic (although not necessarily the theme proper). Each example was classified according to whether the thematic organisation of the ST sentence had been retained in the English translation or whether a different information order had been used. It turned out that in those cases where there was a conflict between grammatical and communicative constraints in the TT *vis à vis* the ST, the information order was only retained in 44% (36/81) of cases, with a similar pattern of distribution across all three texts. So does this suggest that Baker's assertion that translators are unaware of possible strategies is correct? Actually, no, as we can see from the wide range of strategies which the translators did use in the sentences where the thematic organisation was retained sentence-initially, despite structural problems in the English. These are listed below:

- Change of voice from active (ST) to passive (TT):

(1a) Dieses Problem kann man reduzieren, wenn man [...]

(1b) The problem of matching products to requirements can be overcome by [...]

- Restructuring facilitated by a change of verb which allows the object of the ST sentence to be incorporated in the subject of the TT:
  - (2a) Unterstützung sollte der deutsche Aktienmarkt weiterhin von der US-Dollar Entwicklung und vorderhand noch vom Zinsszenario erhalten, so dass wir bis zur Jahresmitte mit neuen Höchstständen rechnen.
  - (2b) However, continued support for the German equity market is likely to stem from the US dollar's trend and, while it lasts, from the current interest rate scenario.
- Promotion of the dative object to subject through a change of verb:
  - (3a) Den sich an einem Benchmark orientierenden Investoren empfehlen wir, die Duration leicht unter dem Benchmark zu halten.
  - (3b) Investors wishing to realign themselves with the market should keep duration slightly below the benchmark, ...
- Use of a topic-naming phrase:
  - (4a) Dem Buy and Hold-Investor empfehlen wir hingegen den Kauf von Anlagen mit kurzer Restlaufzeit.
  - (4b) For the buy-and-hold investor, however, we recommend investing in bonds with short residual maturities.
- Promotion of the indirect object to subject of a passive construction in English:
  - (5a) Der Kostenkontrolle wird oberste Priorität eingeräumt.
  - (5b) Cost control will be assigned the greatest priority.
- Nominalisation of the initial adjective:
  - (6a) Kritisch wird die Branchensituation, falls [...]
  - (6b) Problems will only arise if [...]
- Change of word class: *negativ* becomes the prepositional phrase 'on the negative side':
  - (7a) Negativ steht die politische Unsicherheit zu Buche.
  - (7b) On the negative side, political uncertainties will have to be reckoned with.
- Subjectivalisation:
  - (8a) Bei den Neubestellungen aus dem Inland war 1995 ein deutlicher Rückgang zu verzeichnen.
  - (8b) Domestic order volume decreased sharply in 1995.
- Use of sentence-initial PP ( restricted set, e.g. *following, on the basis of, owing to*):
  - (9a) Mit nur 70 W schafft die Leuchteneinheit eine Flut von Licht, besonders zur Ausleuchtung und Ausstrahlung von: [...]

(9b) From only 70 W this luminaire produces a wash of light particularly for floodlighting and spotlighting:  
[...]

- Transpose phrase to clause:

(10a) Auf eine erneute Volksbefragung in Quebec würden die kanadische Währung, die Zinsen sowie die Finanzmärkte negativ reagieren.

(10b) If another Quebec referendum is scheduled, not only the Canadian dollar but also interest rates and the markets would react negatively.

Having considered those cases where the translator did re-structure in some way to retain the sentence-initial information order of the original text, let us look briefly at those where this was not the case. One possibility is, of course, to follow the grammatical structure, as in example (11):

- opting for a close structural translation, resulting in a subject-initial sentence in the TT, e.g. OVS in the ST -> SVO in the TT:

(11a) **Die letzte bedeutende Abstimmung** gewann die Regierung mit einer Mehrheit von nur einer Stimme.

(11b) The government won **the last important vote** in parliament with a majority of only one.

So far, we have identified two global translation strategies: keep the same information order (examples 1-10), or keep the grammatical structure (example 11). Following Thompson's (1978) typological classification of languages as PWO (pragmatic word order) or GWO (grammatical word order), these global strategies can be labelled a 'pragmatic word order' strategy (+PWO) or a 'grammatical word order' strategy (+GWO) respectively. The two global strategies identified so far can therefore be described in a complementary way as [+PWO,-GWO] and [-PWO,+GWO]. However, if we consider the interaction of these two strategies, logically two further possibilities exist, namely, that both the information order or the grammatical structure are both retained i.e. [+PWO,+GWO] or that neither is retained i.e. [-PWO,-GWO]. An example of [+PWO,+GWO] is hardly conceivable unless the German ST-sentence follows an SVX order, in which case there is no conflict to be resolved in the English translation, as in example (12):

(12a) **Die Serie von Allianzen und Übernahmen in der Pharmabranche** hat mit dem Zusammenschluss von Ciba und Sandoz ihren vorläufigen Höhepunkt erreicht.

(12b) **The series of alliances and takeovers in the pharmaceutical industry** reached a provisional climax with the merger of Ciba and Sandoz.

The fourth possibility of [-PWO,-GWO] is perhaps more puzzling, but is present in the data, typically where the meaning of a sentence-initial adjective has been incorporated into the lexical verb, e.g. the neutral German verb *sich auswirken* ('to have an effect') becomes 'bolster', incorporating the meaning of *positiv*:

(13a) **Positiv** auf den nach Kaufkraftparität unterbewerteten Dollar werden sich die expansive Geldpolitik in Japan und Europa **auswirken**.

(13b) The expansive monetary policy in Japan and Europe will **bolster** the dollar, which is undervalued in purchasing power terms.

But what is the basis for the translator's decision to retain the information order in some cases but not in others, since there are many possibilities for restructuring, as we have seen? In some cases, the answer may lie in the fact that the change of information order does not actually affect the cohesion of the text. This is the case, for instance, in the product specification for OSRAM lighting. The following example illustrates how the translation simply moves the theme proper, i.e. 'luminaires' (as opposed to a thematic element) to sentence-initial position. This is also consistent with Dressler's observations on 'naturalness' in thematic organisation (Dressler 1994:951), where he argues that there is a 'universal preference' for certain elements to coincide, including the theme, hypertheme-related elements and the 'first syntactic constituent of the sentence'. In example (14), 'luminaires' is not only the theme of the sentence, but also the hypertheme of the text:

(14a) Mit beigefügtem Adapter können **mehrere Leuchten** aneinandergereiht werden.

(14b) **Several luminaires** can be linked together with the adapter *supplied*.

In sum, the four possibilities can be glossed as follows:

1. [+PWO,+GWO]

retaining the distribution of information from the ST sentence but without the necessity to change the structure (cf. example 12)

2. [+PWO,-GWO]

retaining the distribution of information of the ST sentence but through a change in structure (cf. examples 1 - 10)

3. [-PWO,-GWO]

retaining neither the structure of the ST sentence nor the distribution of information (cf. example 13)

4. [-PWO,+GWO]

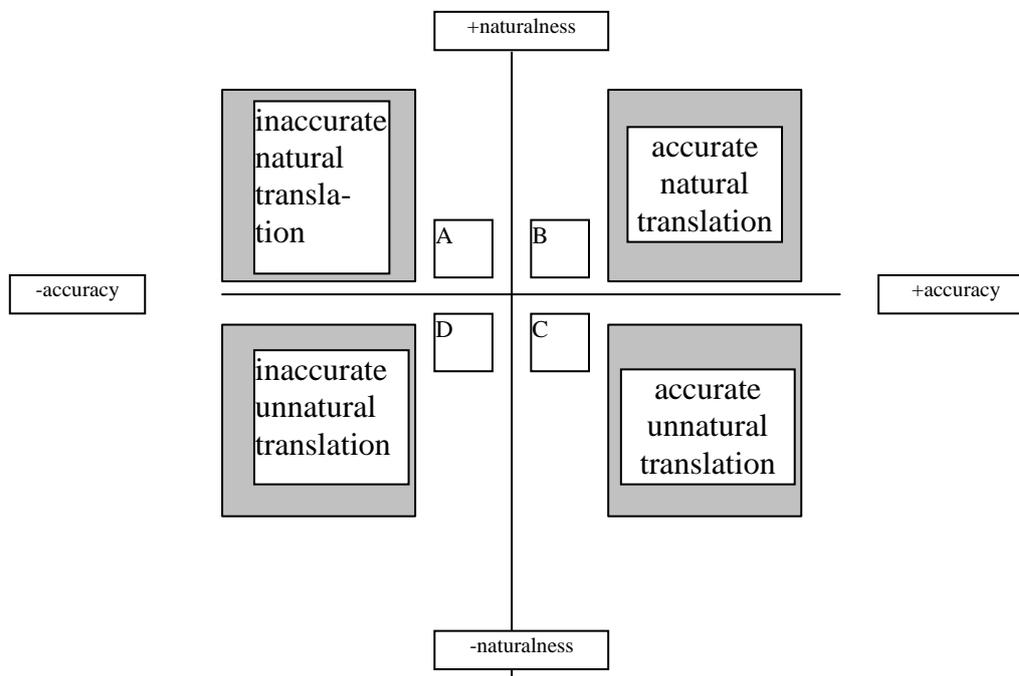
retaining the structure of the ST sentence but with a different distribution of information (cf. Examples 11, 14)

Clearly, Type 1 presents the fewest problems and is still the dominant strategy, representing the majority of declarative sentences, although this has not been discussed here, precisely because there is no tension between the grammatical and communicative constraints. Type 2 shows an imaginative array of restructuring possibilities. Types 3 and 4 demonstrate, however, that other choices exist for the translator. It seems therefore that the translator has a considerable degree of discretion where conflicts arise, although it is not possible to say on the basis of the present data precisely what triggers the decision to opt for a particular strategy. Nevertheless, the inventory of Type 2 strategies seems to offer promising material for pedagogical purposes, for NS and NNS students of translation alike, offering at least the basis of choice for the translator.

### Filling the 'naturalness gap'

We are now able to consider some practical ways in which student translators, including NNS of the TL, can try to improve the naturalness of their translations at the lexical and the textual level, assuming this is appropriate to the text type and the purpose of the translation. In fact, the translation of informative texts for a similar purpose in the target culture seems more appropriate and feasible as an undertaking for NNS translators than the translation of persuasive texts or expressive texts. In the case of reader-focussed persuasive texts, there may be an element of creativity and a degree of idiomaticity which it is hard for a NNS to capture, particularly if the readership is highly targeted. Many genres which can be classified as content-focussed informative texts, however, while also typically requiring a 'domesticating' translation aiming at naturalness and invisibility for the translator, are more likely to offer models which can guide the NNS translator. While author-focussed expressive STs may be more easily interpreted by NNSs of the target language with respect to the degree of 'naturalness' exhibited in the ST, the transfer of this into the TT is again a creative task, for which there are no prototypes or model texts (even if the NNS translator may unwittingly transfer some features of the ST). How then can the NNS translator be helped to fill the so-called 'naturalness' gap in the translation of informative texts from selected genres?

One view of naturalness is, as we have seen, as some kind of opposition to accuracy. We have seen, for instance, in the student translations examples of how NSs may achieve naturalness but without accuracy, and how NNSs may achieve accuracy without naturalness. If we treat naturalness and accuracy as interacting scales, as in Figure 1, we can begin to establish translator profiles which allow us to characterise NS and NNS translator performance:



**Figure 1:** Possible interactions of  $\pm$ accuracy/ $\pm$ naturalness in the context of informative texts for which a TT-orientation is appropriate

The four positions which can be identified can be related to translator profiles as follows:

- A. NS translator with poor grasp of SL
- B. Competent NS translator
- C. Competent NNS translator
- D. NS or NNS translator with poor grasp of SL and TL

Assuming that we are concerned with the translation of informative LSP texts in which domestication is appropriate, then for NNS translators the issue becomes one of how to move from cell C to cell B.

We have seen at various points ways in which certain types of text may be referred to what could be called 'authoritative' - in the sense of appropriate - sources in the target language/culture as an evaluation measure of the naturalness of a translation (prototypes, parallel texts, community testing). Given the increasing availability of digital text - particularly in English - through the World Wide Web, NNSs have the option of creating their own corpus of texts which can be analysed to produce data on phrase- and clause-level decisions. Analysing such texts can show, for instance, typical terms and their use, their phraseology and collocational patterns. Indeed, this suggestion has already been explored in a pedagogical context for the Italian-English translation of medical and economics texts in narrowly-defined domains such as 'post-transfusion hepatitis C' and 'European Monetary Union' and genre (research article, abstract) (Gavioli & Zanettin 1997). Let us consider one example. Given the following ST sentence from an abstract of a research article, the student's first translation follows the original Italian quite closely with regard to the final prepositional phrase in particular:

*In questo lavoro sono state esaminate 183 biopsie epatiche di etilisti con o senza marcatori HBV*

In this paper 183 hepatic biopsies of alcoholics with or without HBV markers were examined

Gavioli & Zanettin point out that a search of the hepatitis corpus revealed that the phrase 'patients without hepatitis C markers' did occur once in the corpus but that the expression 'positive/negative for HBV/HCV markers' was more frequent. Further searches revealed a number of instances of 'negative for HBV/HCV markers' and 'positive/negative for HCV/HCV antibodies/HCV tests'. The translation was therefore revised as follows:

In this paper 183 liver biopsies of alcoholics who were positive or negative for HBV markers were examined

In the text on the German Church Tax, help could have been sought through a simple web search (relevant terms and phrases are shown in bold print), without the need to build a corpus:

German Information Center (<http://www.germany-info.org/index.htm>):

### Religious **Corporations in Public Law**

German law recognizes a number of churches and religious organizations as **corporations in public law** (*Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts*). The Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical (Protestant) Church (*EKD: Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands*), each with just under 28 million members, are the largest and most prominent of the religious bodies designated as **public law corporations** [...]

The main benefit for religious organizations with this status is the eligibility to raise church tax (*Kirchensteuer*) administered by public tax authorities [...]

Building a parallel corpus (texts in language A with their translations in language B) or even just pairs of texts in language A and language B, can also be of help at the text level with regard to the aspects of cohesion which were discussed earlier. The inventory of strategies which has been described for retaining information order in English as a TL in the face of structural difficulties provides the basis for pedagogical material which can be exploited in a number of ways, including comparative text analysis (as a consciousness-raising exercise), discussion of alternatives and their effect on textuality, leading to practice in implementing these strategies, using published translations as a kind of control.

### **Conclusion**

Whatever we call naturalness, and in whatever framework we try to analyse it, it is clear that it is the result of many interacting factors and that it is a relative concept (cf. Newmark's comment that: 'There is no universal naturalness' 1988:28). Whether naturalness is a desirable characteristic of a translation has been discussed here in relation to a number of factors including text type (functions), readership, and LGP and LSP genres. Where naturalness (or a TT-orientation or 'domestication') is appropriate to the text type and translation purpose, NNS translators have a number of options open to them to fill the naturalness gap by seeking out subject-related and functionally-equivalent material of various kinds in the TL. Furthermore, the identification of certain successful translation strategies on a descriptive basis, while problematic in some respects, may also provide pedagogical support during training. In both cases, the increasing availability and accessibility of digital text can play an important role.

Appendix A

**Source Text**

**"Die Kirchensteuer bleibt"**

**Regierungssprecher Vogel widerspricht  
Minister Blüm**

BONN, 3. Januar (dpa/FR). Die Kirchensteuer, die von den staatlichen Finanzämtern im Auftrag der Kirchen eingezogen wird und den beiden großen Kirchen derzeit jährlich je acht Milliarden Mark bringt, bleibt nach Regierungsauffassung so, wie sie ist. Die Bundesregierung habe nicht die Absicht, an ihren Modalitäten etwas zu ändern, versicherte Regierungssprecher Dieter Vogel am Montag vor der Presse in Bonn. Er reagierte damit auf die von den Kirchen heftig kritisierten Äußerungen von Arbeitsminister Norbert Blüm (CDU), der gesagt hatte, das Kirchensteuersystem in Deutschland sei nicht so sicher sei, wie manche Bischöfe glaubten.

Vogel bewertete die Überlegungen Blüms, die dieser im Zusammenhang mit dem Streit um die Finanzierung der Pflegeversicherung und als Reaktion auf den Widerstand der Kirchen gegen die geplante Streichung von zwei Feiertagen gemacht hatte, als persönliche Meinung des Ministers. In der Bundesregierung sei über das Thema niemals beraten oder diskutiert worden. "Da wird sich nichts ändern", betonte er. Der Sprecher der katholischen

Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Rudolf Hammerschmidt, verwies darauf, daß die Kirchensteuer grundgesetzlich verbrieft sei. Wer daran rütteln wolle, müsse das Grundgesetz ändern.

Die Kirchensteuer wurde in der Weimarer Verfassung von 1919 reichsrechtlich garantiert. Dort hieß es, Religionsgesellschaften, die Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts sind, seien berechtigt, aufgrund der bürgerlichen Steuerlisten nach Maßgabe der landesrechtlichen Bestimmungen Steuern zu erheben. 1949 wurden die Kirchenartikel der Weimarer Verfassung in das Grundgesetz, Artikel 140, übernommen. Die Steuer wird aufgrund von Kirchensteuergesetzen erhoben, die - basierend auf Verträgen mit den beiden großen Kirchen von - den Bundesländern erlassen werden.

Die Steuersätze sind an die Lohn- und Einkommensteuern gekoppelt und machen je nach Bundesland acht oder neun Prozent der Steuerschuld aus. Die Haltung in der Öffentlichkeit ist geteilt. Im Frühjahr 1992 plädierten 47 Prozent der westdeutschen Bürger für die Abschaffung der Kirchensteuer, 49 Prozent für deren Beibehaltung. Laut Hammerschmidt erhält der Staat für das "Inkasso" durch die Finanzämter pro Jahr rund 500 Millionen Mark Gebühren.

**Frankfurter Rundschau 4.01.94**

Note: The text has been reproduced with original errors.

## Appendix B

### Target Texts

#### Student M (English NS)

#### "The Church Tax Is To Stay"

The church tax was guaranteed by empirical law in the 1919 constitution of the Weimar republic. There, it was in the form of religious societies which were legal bodies. These bodies had the right to raise taxes based on the civil tax lists as determined by the law of the province. In 1949 the church tax articles of the Weimar constitution became part of the basic law, article 140. The tax is levied due to the church tax laws which, based on contracts with the two big churches, are declared by the individual federal states.

The rate of the tax is set in conjunction with income tax and adds up to about eight or nine percent of the tax burden of each federal state. Public opinion is divided on the issue. In the Spring of 1992, 49 percent of west-germans were in favour of the tax whilst 47 percent called for its abolishment. According to Hammerschmidt the state receives around 500 million Marks commission every year through its tax offices for collection of the tax.

#### Student C (English NS)

#### Church Tax to Stay!!

As of 1919, the Church Tax was guaranteed legal status throughout the German Reich. That is to say, it was justifiable to levy taxes to raise revenue for religious societies, which are open to everyone and fulfil the stipulations of regional legal requirements, appearing on civil tax lists. In 1949, the Church article of the Weimar Constitution took effect as article 140 under the new German Basic Law<sup>1</sup>. The tax was levied according to the Church Tax Laws, which were based on agreements between the two largest churches and enacted upon by the Federal Länder (Regional Assemblies).

The tax rates were linked directly to the wage and income tax levels and according to the state accounted for 8 or 9% of the total tax collected in Germany. Public opinion about this tax was divided. In spring 1992, 47% of the population of West Germany argued for the abolition of the Church Tax system, whilst 49% fought for its continuance. According to Hammerschmidt the German government receives through the tax offices around 500 million Deutschmarks as a charge for the collection of the tax.

<sup>1</sup>. The Weimar constitution was abolished and a new constitution known as the Basic law was created exclusively for the Federal Republic of Germany.

#### Student Cl (English NNS)

In 1919 church tax was guaranteed in the Constitution of Weimar according to the law of the (2nd) Reich. There it was said that religious societies, which were legal public corporations, were allowed to raise taxes on the basis of civil tax lists authorized in accordance with federal regulations. In 1949 the articles of the Constitution of Weimar concerning church tax were

integrated into the new constitution, article 140. The tax is raised on the basis of church tax legislation based on contracts with both churches and enacted by the lander.

Tax rates are coupled on both kinds of income tax and represent, depending on each federal land, eight or nine percent of all taxes to be paid. Public opinion splits. In spring 1992 47 percent of all west-Germans plead for abolishing the church tax, 49% for keeping it.

According to Hammerschmidt, every year the State gets for collecting the tax through Tax Offices 800 million Marks of charges.

Student A (English NNS)

### Church tax to stay

Church tax was legally guaranteed in the Weimar Constitution of 1919. There it was said that religious societies, which are public corporations, were entitled to levy taxes owing to the urban tax lists in accordance with the legal requirements of the Land. In 1949 the ecclesiastical articles of the Weimar Constitution were adopted in the Basic Law, article 140. Tax is levied because of laws concerning church taxes which are enacted by the federal states based on contracts with both big churches.

Tax rates are linked to the income taxes forming eight or nine percent of the tax owing depending on the federal state. The attitude in public is divided. In spring 1992 47% of West-German citizens pleaded for the abolition of church tax. 49 percent pleaded for its retention. According to Hammerschmidt the state receives by the collection through the tax offices about 500 million Deutschmark per year.

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