

A frame-based approach to the pragmatics of “bekanntlich” and English translation equivalents

Within functional approaches to translation theory (e.g. Reiss & Vermeer 1984), the text is considered the primary unit of translation. Several models developed for describing the pragmatic features of a text (e.g. House 1997, Nord 2009) propose to derive individual translation choices from the functional characterisation of the text as a whole. However, not all pragmatic phenomena can be fully accounted for by textual factors. Instead, they may be rather independent of the overall text and be tied to specific lexical items or grammatical constructions.

A case in point is the phenomenon of a speaker referring to shared prior knowledge of the participants of the communicative interaction. This pragmatic function can be realised by formulaic expressions such as *wie Sie wissen* (Staffeldt 2011) (*as you know*) as well as the German adverb *bekanntlich*. The pragmatics of *bekanntlich* and its English translation equivalents will be sketched out using corpora and frame semantic annotation, proposing pragmatic frames as a *tertium comparationis* in translation analysis. The parallel corpora used to explore *bekanntlich* together with the English source language expressions it translates are DGT-TM (Steinberger et al. 2012) and Europarl UdS (Karakanta et al. 2018), both consisting of German translations of primarily or exclusively English original EU texts.

We follow [Anonymized] in modelling the pragmatic content of the expression by means of frames as developed in the tradition of Fillmorean frame semantics (1982), and refer to these as ‘pragmatic frames’. Each frame consists of a set of interrelated frame elements, i.e. frame-specific roles that can activate each other. We assume *bekanntlich* to regularly evoke the pragmatic frame `Common_ground`¹ that models a speaker claiming some `CONTENT` to be prior knowledge (with degrees of `FAMILIARITY`) shared by the `COGNIZERS` who are participants of the communicative interaction, necessarily including the utterance’s addressee(s). The expressions evoking this frame differ with respect to which of these frame elements are realised in the text: most importantly, the `COGNIZERS` may be lexically specified, commonly by deictic person reference especially with *wie wir/ Sie/ alle wissen* (*as we/ you/ everybody know(s)*), or left to be inferred from the communicative context as is the case with *bekanntlich*.

Comparing the English source language equivalents of *bekanntlich* across corpora that reflect different registers, it appears that in Europarl UdS, the participants of the communicative interaction are more often than not lexically realised ((1)-(2)). In DGT-TM and the minority of cases in Europarl UdS, however, the `COGNIZERS` remain implicit and what is most interesting, do not seem to include the addressee ((3)-(5)). Indeed, the speaker/writer can refer to themselves as the only `COGNIZER` explicitly as in (3) or implicitly by passive voice ((4), (5)). The translation pair *it is recalled that* – *bekanntlich* in (4) appears to be a feature of recitals in EU legislative acts in particular and in this context is used to express that the parties agreeing on the act are aware of some fact. This usage of *bekanntlich* is motivated semantically rather than pragmatically and can be found to evoke the lexical-semantic frame `Awareness_status`. It could be assumed that this divergence in pragmatic versus semantic use of *bekanntlich* is an influence of the source text. This needs to be investigated by further research on its use in comparable original German texts, which will allow us to assess the translation choice of *bekanntlich* in the contexts in question.

¹ The frame is described in German as `Gemeinsames_Vorwissen`, see www.german-framenet.de. Following conventions in frame semantics, frames are set in Courier, frame elements in small caps.

ANNEX

Text Examples

Europarl UdS

- (1) a. As we all know, sovereignty cannot be transferred and competences cannot be conferred without the full agreement of 27 Member States.
b. Souveränität kann bekanntlich nicht übertragen werden und Zuständigkeiten können ohne die geschlossene Zustimmung aller 27 Mitgliedstaaten nicht übertragen werden.
- (2) a. Eventually they will be competing directly with the US for ever-diminishing supplies, which is a forbidding thought and, as we know, fossil fuels are running out very quickly.
b. Irgendwann wird sich China mit Amerika um die immer knapper werdenden Vorräte streiten, was nicht gerade ein beruhigender Gedanke ist, zumal die fossilen Brennstoffe bekanntlich rasch zur Neige gehen.
- (3) a. I know certain Member States feel that a far longer transition period will be necessary.
b. Einige Mitgliedstaaten halten bekanntlich eine weitaus längere Übergangszeit für notwendig.

DGT-TM

- (4) a. It is recalled that the authorities in Laos as well as potential producers/exporters in this country were informed of the ongoing investigation.
b. Bekanntlich wurden die laotischen Behörden sowie potenzielle Hersteller/Ausführer in Laos von der laufenden Untersuchung in Kenntnis gesetzt.
- (5) a. It is known that that nomenclature does not cover all special export refund cases but the Commission does not require that kind of detail.
b. In diesem Verzeichnis sind bekanntlich nicht alle Sonderfälle bei den Ausfuhrerstattungen abgedeckt, die Kommission benötigt diese Details jedoch nicht.

References

[Anonymized]

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