

## Normative and Abstract Representations in Translation

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**Abstract.** Translation theory has, for the most part, concentrated on the product and excluded the process. It has adopted a normative attitude by making inferences through the description and evaluation of the translation product. But to be comprehensive and useful a theory of translation has to describe and explain both the process and the product. An adequate description and explanation of the process is emphasized in this study: this approach demands an investigation of a quite different set of problems and answers a quite different set of questions. It stresses the importance of translating as a mental rather than a physical act. The investigation is conducted within the framework of language perception, information processing, memory, and cognitive science. It concludes with the belief that an analysis of intellectuality in the act of translating is imperative for it can provide translator-trainees with a body of information indispensable to produce a reliable translation product. An effective approach in translating has to be oriented to the specifications of the cognitive processes as observed and adopted by professional translators.

Traditionally, the study of translation has been dominated by the debate about its status as an art or a science. This proposed dichotomy between “art” and “science” is still current enough to form titles of books such as *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation* by Malone [1] and *The Craft of Translation* by Biguenet and Schulte [2].

Nida and Taber [3], Catford [4], Wills [5] and Lefevre [6] have argued that translation theorists have made little systematic use of the techniques and insights of contemporary linguistics. They also argued that linguists have been at best neutral and at worst actually hostile to the notion of a theory of translation. Given these facts, the translation theory finds itself today seriously in the strongest contrast with that of the life sciences. The fundamental cause of this state of affair is the normative approach that goes as far back as Tytler’s article “Essay on the Principle of Translation” published in 1791[7]. To tackle this issue from a linguistic perspective we can argue that linguists have misconstrued the objectives and methods of translation theory. Bell [8] has argued that “from the applied

linguistic point of view, translation theory can be criticized for having limited its activities to

the level of technique (the language teaching equivalent of classroom activities) or at best, to that of method ( in language teaching term, the equivalent of global collections of techniques; audio-visual method, direct method, etc.) . This approach is faulty for what we need is first a principled approach from which the rest of the analysis would follow. Besides, most scholars now admit that it would almost be true to say that there are no universally accepted principles of translation. Newmark [9] argued that lists of approved techniques and rules for translation are endless and continue to appear. The rules and principles promulgated for translation have for centuries, been of the normative regulatory type - the setting up of a series of maxims consisting of do's and don'ts. But translation is not a linear practice in which stages are sequential in strict order. Even though translation is an integrated process where every stage must be passed through, still its order is not fixed. From this proceeds that a theory of translation to be comprehensive and useful must attempt to describe and explain both the process and the product. An adequate description and explanation of the phenomenon of translation demands that a set of cognition related questions have to be addressed:

- 1- What knowledge and skills must the translator possess ?
- 2 - How can we specify translator competence?
- 3 - What do translators do when they translate?
- 4 - How are logical relationships organized and mapped onto the syntactic systems of a language and realized as a text?
- 5 - What is the nature of meaning and the process of information in memory?

Before venturing into a detailed analysis of the above questions it is important to point out that the reason there is a difference of opinion on translation is because there are (1) substantial differences between languages, (2) the extreme positions of prescriptive and proscriptive approaches adopted in relation to translation, and (3) there are as many definitions of translation as there are of "sentences."

Languages are different from each other; they are different in form; they have distinct codes and rules regulating the construction of grammatical stretches of language and these forms have different meanings. To shift from one language to another is to alter the form ; contrasting forms can convey meanings that cannot but fail to coincide totally.

Given the fact that there is no absolute synonymy even between words in the same language then what can be said of the synonyms and antonyms between diverse languages!

### Logic of Approach

The reason this study advocates a psychological analysis of the cognitive process in translation is because any human language is founded on a code of elements that combine to signal a semantic "sense." The human language is viewed here as a communication system that uses the forms of the code to refer to entities in the world of the senses and in the world of the mind. Signals initiated by human languages do possess communicative values.

To initiate a thorough analysis of the proposal of this study, there is a need to answer the question: what is the relationship between the phenomena (observed through the senses) and the words that are used to refer to those phenomena? Traditionally and according to Plato's position, this relation is determined by the structure of the universe. According to Aristotle, this link is arbitrary and constrained by mere social conventions. Translation, in this regard, involves a relation between sensation and perception. It involves the processes of encoding and decoding, along with the nature of memory systems and the types of entry stored there. In translation, the semantic sense is extended to include the ideational, interpersonal, logical, grammatical and rhetorical systems. These components are realized by the semantic senses and they are characterized by being cognitive in nature.

Due to this justification proceeds that a translation theory can not be cohesive unless linguistics is linked to psychology of language use. Through this linkage we attempt to understand the process of translation, and understand what translators do when they translate.

This is a call to turn the procedural knowledge which the translators possess into factual knowledge to be probed and shared. By doing this we would be attempting to find a model that shows the transformation of the source language text (SLT) into a target language text (TLT). That model can be tailored by means of studying the processes which take place within memory and cognition in general. Practically, this transformation is an analysis of the source language text (SLT) into a non-language specific or semantic representation .

What is phenomenal here is that it is the process that creates the product , and it is only by understanding the process we can hope to improve the translator-trainees' skills. This is true in spite of Newmark's claim [10] that: "any scientific investigation of what goes in the brain ( mind, nerves, cells) during the process of translating is remote and at present speculative." The question of this proposed cognitive process in translation is supported by de Beaugrande [11] who has argued that: " Part of a theory of translation would account for the process of moving from original text to mental representation."

Again this is a cry against the descriptive and normative approach mentioned earlier. It opposes establishing a set of norms for effecting the perfect translation. An effective orientation has to be towards the objective specification of the cognitive steps and stages through which the translator works. But some scholars have shown a certain reservation on this approach: de Beaugrande [11] for example warns: "It is inappropriate to expect that a theoretical model of translation should solve all the problems a translator encounters. Instead it should formulate a set of strategies for approaching problems and for coordinating the different aspects entailed."

### **Tactics and Competence**

In actual cognitive process of translating translators do not translate a clause from language /A/ into a clause from language /B/. They break down the A clause into its semantic representation and use that as a basis for the building of an alternative clause in another language. As it is well known language texts contain stretches of speech with a degree of internal cohesion achieved by the collocation of words which tend to co-occur and create phrases or partial phrases. This reality means that it is not necessarily for every letter or word in the text of the message to be conveyed adequately. This is true because the linkage between the syntactic and the semantic links between all elements within the structures of the individual sentences is not parallel between sentences. This makes it imperative to concentrate on the semantic information relevant to the sense of the clause in general.

What is called into play here is not syntax alone but syntax combined with semantic information. It is this combination that gives the language user access to the literal meaning of the clause and the elocutionary force of the speech act. It gives the translator an access to what is being referred to ( the propositional context).

To return to the question of the specifications of the cognitive process, here is an analogy between the translator and the monolingual. Both the translator and the monolingual possess procedural knowledge about language - they know how to operate the system. But to possess a factual knowledge is something and to know that the system has such and such characteristics is an altogether a different story. For most language users, particularly monolingual readers, one would expect that once the meaning has been extracted from the clause and converted into its semantic representation, its syntactic form would be deleted from the short term memory (STM) and its meaning is stored in the long term memory (LTM). The translators are more consciously aware of the given language and of the resources it contains than the monolingual communicators. Knowing that they will need to be aware of thematic markedness when they come to write the target language text (TLT), translators have to retain in their minds some of these syntactic information. Sequentially they begin to translate with the full resources of the semantic

representations of the clauses. They do that with the unity of the text organized as a schema ready in memory. This configuration is converted by the semantic synthesizer into a semantic structure. Translators act that way because they know that constitutive principles that define textual communication are relational in character. They concern themselves with how occurrences are connected to other occurrences. According to de Beaugrande and Dressler [12] this connection is done: (1) via grammatical dependencies on the surface (cohesion); (2) via conceptual dependencies in the textual world (coherence); (3) via the attitudes of the participants toward the text ( intentionality and acceptability); (4) via the incorporation of the new and the unexpected (informativity); (5) via the setting (situationality); and (6) via the mutual relevance of separate texts (intertextuality).

This presentation is in itself an answer to the following inquiries:

- 1- What is the nature of the linguistic knowledge and other skills required by the translator?
- 2 - What knowledge and skills do translators, as text processors, possess?
- 3 - How can that knowledge and skill enable them to negotiate meaning through texts?
- 4 - How do they activate the knowledge they have to analyze (read the source language text) and synthesize texts (write the translation product)?

According to Johnson Laird [13] a professional translator has access to five distinct kinds of knowledge: target language knowledge, text-type knowledge, source language knowledge, subject-area knowledge, and contrastive knowledge. He further adds that a lack of knowledge or control in any of the first three cases would mean that the translator cannot translate. Without the first two, even literal meaning would elude the translator. Without "source language knowledge," meaning would be limited to the literal sense carried by utterances. These utterances might possess formal cohesion, but still they would lack functional coherence and communicative value. Hymes [14] says: "the knowledge and ability possessed by the translator that permit him/her to create discourse (communicative acts) are not only (and not necessarily) grammatical but ... socially appropriate."

The translators have to be quite familiar with the discourse techniques in both source and target languages. They should familiarize themselves with the question of discourse as a communicative event for it draws on the meaning potential of the language and other systems of communication.

### **Domain of Knowledge**

The universe of discourse cannot but be culture- specific, and the extent that different cultures co-occur with different languages is reflected in different

lexicons. It is the mind of the translator that mediates between cultures and languages.

The meaning potentials of any natural language help to carry the communicative values or the illocutionary force of a speech act. This is done through utterances linked by means of coherence. This is very much true because coherence deals with how propositions and clauses hold together. Both cohesion and coherence have the function of binding the text together by creating sequences of meanings.

There are parallels between the specification of the linguistic options and the psychological processes by which selections are made. But there is no simple one-to-one relation between syntactic and propositional structure. The translator's initial task is to decompose the language specific clauses of the written text into their universal abstract content (proposition). Until and unless this is done and an additional information is added to it to create the semantic representation of the clause, the translation act remains in a stagnated position.

In processing a given text the translators call upon many domains of knowledge. They concern themselves with a rule-governed form of behavior. Wills [15], for instance, asserts that "the text oriented nature necessarily requires that the translator has to be fully acquainted with the syntactic, semantic, stylistic and text pragmatic comprehension of the original text." A light-hearted question might be appropriate here: Why, we might wonder, do we ask "Is that a threat or a promise?" and when we do, why do our hearers often laugh? It is obviously not as simple as it appears; if it were, translation would be a great deal easier than it is. Some utterances seem or are intended to count as particular speech acts but the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation of that intention fail to coincide. This is an indication that there is some hope for the universality of the speech act at the propositional level but not at the level of illocutionary force. That is a likely realization that would help to explain how the translator can often replicate the text with ease but finds much greater difficulty in coping with grasping and representing the writer's intention.

### **Meaning and Equivalence**

Translation scholars have to be semanticists over and above everything else because meaning is the kingpin in any translation act. But the problem in translation is not the meaning of individual words. The greater problem is the meaning that is derived from the relationship of word to word rather than that which relates to the word in isolation. This entails that translators have to deal not only with the obvious semantic sense of a stretch of words but with their communicative values as well.

Any discussion of word meaning inevitably involves the relating of concepts (or the result of perception and its organization in the long-term memory) to lexical items that form part of the structure of the linguistic code. The essential characteristic of the lexical systems is not a precise boundary-making; there is some sort of inherent fuzziness of language that presents the most formidable obstacle to translators. A lack of fit between the lexical items of two languages is a problematic issue that continually faces translators. The relationships of similarity and difference between concepts ( and the words that express them) do not necessarily coincide in languages.

Word meaning can only be arrived at through the study of the meaning of the word in the linguistic co-text of the sentence. Sentence meaning depends on the setting of the sentence in its communicative context. A skilled reading depends on seeing relationships between the sentences of a text and making inferences from such relationships. Some sentences entail other sentences, some suggest implications; while others depend on presuppositions that the writer makes about the reader's knowledge and expectations. Words occur in relatively predictable ways: nouns occur with particular adjectives or verbs; verbs occur with particular adverbials.... in short one word calls up another.

To talk about the sense of similitude between translation process and conceptualization let's think of what happens when we remember what someone said or wrote. We tend to remember it in an "edited" and idealized form; not in the actual utterance with its pauses, slips of the tongue...etc. Unlike utterances, sentences are abstracts and they exist only in the mind. A proposition is even more abstract and stands as a unit of meaning that constitutes the subject matter of a sentence. Because the proposition underlies the diversity of sentences and expresses a meaning in a particular language then its role is central to the processing of texts. Newmark [10] has argued that propositions are the major constituent of the universal "semantic representation." Through this representation texts can be decomposed and ultimately can be created. He also stated that this process is central to any understanding of translation. The reason the concept of proposition has gained such a strong momentum is because "proposition" is not tied to a specific language but underlies all human languages. Tancock [16] has argued that: "The important thing is to set aside all the words of the original text and see the picture clearly. Having seen the picture the translator must write down what he sees in the simplest English. It is the idea or the picture that has to be communicated, and not equivalents of the actual words."

Retrieving the illocutionary force of the entire text as well as the forces of the elements making up the text, are basic principles in explicating texture, in negotiating structure and ,ultimately, in reconstructing context.

## Conclusion

What we have on our hands is a scientific phenomenon called translation. It is an art in thinking, an art in writing, and an art in reading. Even though translation is based on reasoned argument, still it should be supported by evidence derived from logic and cognition. Because a model stands for an external representation of the theory we have in mind a model of translation process at the cognitive level is needed. While the theory answers the question "why?," a model answers the question "what?" Being a tangible object, a model stands for the idea embodied in the theory.

An initial sketch of this model demands that in translation we have to study texts not merely by means of the traditional levels of linguistic analysis (syntax and semantics) but by making use of stylistics, cognition, and recent advances in discourse analysis. We target models of the dynamics of the process itself rather than static descriptions of the structures of the product. What we expect is a statement of the conventions which constrain the cognitive activity of translation rather than definitions of rules which determine it. But how is it possible to specify the nature of this mechanism? The answer is to work back from the output of the mechanism and make a set of statements about the necessary characteristics of the system itself (the process): as a related example we can make use of the logical process of induction. It is axiomatic that human beings have a degree of access to human mind, and with this accessibility we can establish a great deal of knowledge through the substantial insights we have into the workings of our own minds. That can be made possible by introspection i.e., by adopting a deductive and induction approaches to the problem and consequently building a model of what we ourselves are doing when we translate. In support of this idea de Beaugrande and Dresslor [12] have stated: "We should look to discover regularities, strategies, motivations, preferences, and defaults rather than rules and laws. Dominance can offer more realistic classifications than can strict categories. Acceptability and appropriateness are more crucial standards than grammaticality and well-formedness."

In our attempt to make sense of translation as a process rather than a product and to avoid producing lists of translation problems and proposals on how to solve them, we have to draw on cognitive science and the dynamics of a human language in mind. In this case a psychological model of human information processing explains how is it that we are able to collect data from the senses and convert it into meaningful information in the mind. It is an attempt to externalize the internal system by molding it. This approach is founded on the belief that translators execute their mission based on: (1) the physical entities which they experience through senses and (2) the abstract representation of those experiences and entities in the mind. Dependable information on the process of translation can only become available as translator trainees become more aware of how they

translate. Specifying translator competence requires that we consider both abstract knowledge system and crucial practical skills of reading and writing. This awareness can alert the translator-trainers to the mechanisms which link the highly abstract and universal proposition with the totally physical and context-dependent utterance or text. The process of translating should be modeled in a way that reflects its position within the psychological domain of information processing.

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## التمثيل التجريدي والمعياري في عملية الترجمة

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ملخص البحث. ركزت نظرية الترجمة في معظمها على نتائج الترجمة واستنتت العمليات الذهنية التي ترافقها . . . فقد تبنت موقفا معياريا مستخلصا من استدلالات مستقاة من وصف وتقييم نتائج الترجمة. لكن لجعل الترجمة مفيدة وشاملة لا بد وأن تتناول في الشرح كلا من هذين الجانبين ولذلك جاءت هذه الدراسة لتقدم شرحا للعمليات الذهنية التي ترافق الترجمة. يقتضي هذا التوجه دراسة تتناول مجموعة من المشاكل والقضايا إضافة إلى تقديم إجابات المجموعة مختلفة من الأسئلة. ومن هذا المنطلق تعرض هذه الدراسة الترجمة كعملية ذهنية أكثر منها مادية وتتناول هذا الجانب ضمن إطار اللغة وإدراكها وحركة المعلومات في الفكر ودور الذاكرة والأطر الذهنية الأخرى. تستخلص هذه الدراسة إلى قناعة بأن تحليل مجال الذكاء والحركة الذهنية في عملية الترجمة هو شيء لا يمكن الاستغناء عنه لأنه يقدم للمتدربين من المترجمين جملة من المعلومات الضرورية لطرح ترجمة يعتمد عليها. وعليه فلا بد لأي توجه فعال في هذا المجال أن يكون موجها لدراسة حديثات العمليات الذهنية وفق دقائق الأمور التي يتبناها ويعمل بها المترجمون المحترفون.