

A Spectrum of Different Translation Options

Atef Faleh Youssef

*Assistant Professor, Department of European Languages and Translation,
College of Languages and Translation,
King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*

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Abstract. Quine's position on translation facts and values has contributed new approaches to the philosophical concept of translatability. In defense of Quine's position, this research presents a spectrum of different opinions expressed on the logic of translatability and on the philosophical contentions of translation in general.

It asserts that the reason "translation" has not been determined is because people have independently many different patterns of propositional attitudes. Each pattern would show up in different complex systems of verbal dispositions.

It concludes with the approach that translation is a matter of a whole scheme meeting a complex totality of conditions. Because it is always possible to produce incompatible construals of logical connectives, a specification of the actual constraints on translation shall continue to be controversial. A correct translation of a single sentence is only relative to some envisioned general scheme of translation.

Assuming, contrary to the fact, that we know what a semantic theory should look like, this paper maintains that for any given body of data about people's actual linguistic and other behavior, any number of incompatible semantic theories can be devised. Basic to this perception and due to the fact that exact translation between different languages is possible, a spectrum of different opinions and options on the degree of translatability is worth an investigation.

Translation persists as a very rough approximation of what has been said and intended in the original source language text (SLT). Just as there is a potential infinity of sentences to be translated, there is a potential infinity of possible contexts of utterances for each of these sentences. This means that there is no justification for assuming that one sentence or even a set of roughly interchangeable sentences could even in principle be offered as the translation(s) of a given sentence. In this regard, Quine [1, pp. 1-25] argues that there is no way of actually specifying the sublet of contents in which sentence X might be translated by sentence Y.

At this point of analysis there is a need to summarize the two salient and incongruent views that are relevant to the philosophy of translation. One extreme view

advanced by Katz [2,p.20] claims that for any sentence of one natural language there is at least one sentence in every other natural language that expresses the same proposition. The other extreme view as advanced by Quine [3,pp.178-83] claims that exact translation between different languages is impossible and conceptual differences are held to preclude exact translation altogether. Quine [4,pp.11-25, 56] holds that the cultural and physical contexts of an expression in X language make speakers of Y language unfamiliar with the constraints of that expression. In support of Quine's position, Lenneberg maintains that practically no common frame of reference and [5, pp. 463-71] no basis for a segmental and no one-by-one comparison exist between different languages.

Experience in practical translation has shown that translators, though they may make use of dictionaries and grammars, use nothing that can be counted as a translation manual or scheme. As an explanation of this phenomenon, Quine [6, pp. 386-98] says that because translation schemes can not be compatible with behavioral dispositions, the totality of speech dispositions makes schemes for translating one language into another divergent and incompatible with one another. Again he insists that translation manuals must be finitely specifiable. But Churchland [7,pp.51-63] has argued that there is no reason why Quine should strive to make the notion of communicational utility precise. He further argued that Quine need only concede that this notion can be given some objective foundation in our behavioral disposition to facilitate our dealings with one another. My own approach is that translation manuals that can be agreed upon can not be supposed to consist of a base infinite pairing of sentences. The trouble is that no translation can do justice to two languages ground in different forms of life. And no language can provide the means to specify translations over a potential infinity of possible sentences. Because translation is a matter of a whole scheme meeting a complex totality of conditions, it is difficult to specify the actual constraints on translation. Practical translation has shown that translators engaged in radical translation take count of a whole range of semantic and linguistic factors whose relative weight would be exceedingly hard to assess. This analysis brings Quine's approach back to the focus. Quine [8, pp.91-113] argues that translation is left equivocal by the totality of evidences such as beliefs, wants, intentions, and other propositional attitudes. Our ordinary notions of sameness of meaning and translation are intimately enmeshed in our beliefs, wants, and other propositional attitudes.

Behavior dispositions, according to Quine, is the only evidence that can be counted on as bearing on translation. Friedman [9,pp. 353-74] resists Quine's reasoning that "what we take to be translation relations between sentences are not generally matters of fact." Preserving sameness of truth values permits countless sentences to be translated by sentences that do not mean the same exact translation. My position is that exactness of translation is a matter of degree with the complete coincidence of translation of each sentence by itself as a limit.

Since there are several dimensions along which exactness might be sought, the above mentioned limit can be approached from several different directions. To suggest that translated and translating sentences should have the same true values is not

adequate. And to suggest that sentences held true by speakers of the one language should also be held true by speakers of the other is not adequate either. The nature of the technicalities adopted by practical translators makes a lot of difference. Depending on their predominant purposes and interests, different translators give priority to maximizing different kinds of exactness. Nancy Tuana [10, pp. 283-91] argues that translators are bound to impose their own logic on the sentences they are translating. The sort of behavior that a translator is exposed to (in relation to a given sentence at a given time) will generally depend on his/her total mental state at that time. She also argues that when translators have different purposes they tend to associate sentences with different platonic meanings. This means that in translation it will always be possible to produce incompatible construals of logical connectives.

Not to claim that questions of translations are questions of facts is grounded in the belief that the nature of facts in translation is inconclusive. Because a statement about translation does not always have a separable empirical consequences that it can call its own. Quine [11] in this regard, says that there can be empirically equivalent theories of the world but they are mutually incompatible. An experience in translation might conflict with a whole theory of system of beliefs, but it does not determine just which beliefs must be revised. The complex interconnections among beliefs ensure that there is an indefinitely wide range of ways of accommodating the translation recalcitrant experience.

From the analysis above it proceeds that there is no such thing as pure defined semantic knowledge. Knowledge of sameness of meaning is not at all the same as pure knowledge of meanings unmixed with knowledge about non linguistic facts. What might be thought of as pure semantic knowledge is inextricably merged with what speakers of natural languages would like to call non-linguistic beliefs.

Because a translator's knowledge of a given language involves knowledge of the meanings of its sentences, it is wrong to say that translation aims to represent the meanings of sentences in one language by correlating those sentences with sentences of another language. Knowing the meanings of the sentences of a language need involve no more than knowing how to use and interpret them. But again this knowledge may not have an objectively distinct component because relations of sameness of meaning for sentences are not matters of fact. It is one thing to say "two expressions mean the same," but quite another to say their synonymy holds in virtue of a special class of pure semantic facts. In a related issue that is sentence synonymy, Quine [3, pp. 178-83] believes that the totality of possible evidence still leaves room for conflicting statements pertinent to this kind of synonymy. He argues that we should be mistaken if we assume identity of stimulus languages. Chomsky [12, pp. 182-98] on the opposite end of this approach, complains that Quine has failed to show that linguistics in general and theories of translation in particular are undermined by an evidence which is different from that undermines physics. Faced with this accusation, Quine [13, p. 303] concedes that linguistics and theories of translation are like physics in being underdetermined by all possible data. He insists that a theory in physics is the ultimate parameter and what makes the indeterminacy of translation additional is that it withstands this whole truth

about nature. Quine also argues that theories of translation are not only underdetermined, but they are underdetermined even by the totality of truths expressible in terms of physics.

The precise difference between translation schemes or manuals and chemical and biological theories is that we have free choice between translation manuals but do not have the same choice between chemical theories. Peter Hylton [14, pp.167-84] and Christopher Hookway [15] argue that this point of indeterminacy is that the maxims which a linguist uses are not determined by physics. They also argue that different maxims, yielding different translations, would be equally compatible with physics. It is the use of just these maxims which is left indeterminate even after physical theory is fixed.

There are wide areas of disagreement among linguists pertinent to goals, methods and relevant theoretical frameworks. This disagreement makes non-semantic parts of grammar subject to indeterminacies of various kinds. But serious disputes over what the norms are do not obliterate the fact that the norms are there and they are fixed by communal practice in translation. In this regard, Chomsky [16, p.4] argues that the terms and statements occurring in instrumental grammars often have systematic roles. They are not necessarily intended to have objective reference to be uniquely correct. He holds that "grammars are constrained not only by the practical or aesthetic demands of economy, manageability and the like, but also by the requirement that they somehow reflect psychological reality."

If the non-semantic parts of grammar were purely instrumental, and moreover the classes of items to be generated or accepted by them were constrained by objective criteria, there would be no room for significant indeterminacies outside translation. In his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* Chomsky [16, p.4] argues that linguistic theory is concerned with discovering a mental reality underlying actual behavior. This means that Chomsky views grammar as part of psychological realities that constrain the internal structure of grammar as well as their outputs.

Chomsky's view does not seem to be based on assumptions about propositional attitudes. It has to do with things of which we are normally unaware in ourselves as well as in others. These things are the internal structures and processes whereby our utterances are produced and understood. It seems to me that Chomsky's approach to some of the non semantic parts of grammar leaves an additional room for relevant sort of indeterminacy. This sort of indeterminacy would be an integral part of the indeterminacy of translation and not a distinct variety.

Chomsky's position is objectionable to Quine who has complained of the obscurity of the idea that a person's behavior could be guided by a system of rules of which that person is not consciously aware. Quine complained that the rules are heeded inarticulately. In his book *Word and Object*, Quine [4, pp.1-25,26] is committed to the realities of physical structures and to whatever facts about disposition that may be solidly based on these facts. He does not deny that there are realities underlying people's linguistic capacities but he disagrees with Chomsky over the nature of these underlying

realities. Quine [17, pp. 1-23] does not view propositional attitudes as facts because propositional attitudes do not determine sameness of meaning. His acceptable facts are not by themselves enough to determine propositional attitudes. In generative grammar, Chomsky [16, p.4] deals with mental processes that characterize the knowledge of two given languages. These processes provide the basis for the two languages actual use by a speaker-hearer. In an attempt to find some correlation between Quine's and Chomsky's, Katz, in his book *Semantic and Conceptual Change* [18, pp. 327-84] asserts that Chomsky's approach of syntactic theory is a model for a semantic theory. He conceives Chomsky's conception of grammar as idealization of speaker's knowledge of language as theorizing in the advanced science. Katz claims that through this theorization Quine envisions a possibility of a model on semantic theory.

From the above analysis it proceeds that correct translation of a single sentence is only relative to some envisioned general scheme of translation. If two translation manuals conflict, it can only be because at least one of them has failed to take proper account of the truth condition of some crucial sentences. In support of this philosophical approach, Bennet [19, p.262] argues that every single fact about a sentence from a language must be mirrored by a fact about a sentence from another language. But because truth conditions can never be compatible, this leads to a disguised synonymy. Davidson [20, pp. 345-49] argues that determinacy of translation can be possible only when we manage to discover enough reliable constraints on translation. But I do not think that a given data base with a set of constraints applying to it will yield a unique solution to translation problems. It is not even generally true that adding more constraints will automatically cut down the number of possible solutions. Within our own total evolving doctrine we can judge truth as earnestly as can be. I advocate Quine's position. He holds that there are no facts, no realities other than those constituted or underlain by facts statable in terms of physics. Quine [21, p. 303] argues that if some psychological or semantic interpretation is not strictly implied by the physically statable facts, its sentences do not, in general, state facts at all.

Facts to Quine are whatever provided for by our total evolving theory of nature. What people regard as having been conclusively established, like what they regard as evidence, must depend partly on what beliefs they have. This means that in theories of translation questions about synonymy relations are not questions of facts. In chapter ten of his book *Word and Object*, Quine [4, pp.1-25,26] argues that where there are conceptual differences between different communities there is no reason to expect uniquely correct translation. In contrast to this approach, Lyons [22, p.643] argues that translation between any two languages operates, in principle, with respect to contextualized utterances. He adds that translation related notions can be tackled by linguistics provided they can be precisely stated and justified in terms of their value in explanations. Lyons concludes that evidence about the semantic properties and relations of expressions in languages can be established to confirm the existence of synonymy or translation relations. He believes that there is as much a fact of the matter about identity of sense as about anything else in science. But again this approach does not appeal to Quine. In his article "Taking the Indeterminacy of Translation One Step Further" Quine

[11, pp.283-91] insists that in translation there is no identity of sense as it is the case about anything else in science.

What can be derived from the analysis above and what is stable is that human languages contain a structure of interconnected sentences which forms a single connected fabric. That fabric includes all sciences and everything we ever say about the world. On this holistic account I can further argue that a sentence in any language is meaningless except relative to its own theory or connected fabric. A sentence meaning depends on its own place in its own theory or fabric. ...In a single language no sentence other than itself will adequately translate a given sentence.

Dummett [23,p.414] Boorse [24,pp. 369-87] Papineau [25, p.187] oppose the argument that translations that can be achieved prove the existence of a scope for divergent translations. They argue that there might be areas of language where two communities' predispositions and tendencies overlap and in such case sentences confined to these areas could be fully translated. My position is that we can ignore linguistic areas where agreement reigns; but when differences in form of life arise translation indeterminacy emerges.

It is unsound to say that for any given language there is only one possible order; through that order language components can be acquired. Kripke [26,p.15] advocates this negation. He supports his position on the ground that there is a difference between actual utterances in context or occurrences of thoughts and the potential infinities of interpretations consistent with the acquired data. My belief is that a speakers' totality of dispositions leaves room for significant conflict over sentence translation. This means that considerations of practicality and plausibility can't be ignored.

Not all linguists and philosophers believe that people who speak the same language have independently many different patterns of propositional attitudes and each pattern would show up in different complex systems of verbal dispositions. Putnam, for instance, in *Reason, Truth and History* [27,p.52] argues that a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to a particular objects within the conceptual scheme of those users. He believes that objects do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. And since objects and signs are alike internal to the scheme of description, then it is possible to say what matches what. Putnam claims that we can put the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. But Quine rejects [3, pp.178-83] the analytic-synthetic distinction mainly because of doubts about meaning and synonymy. Quine [11] insists that there seems to be no uniquely correct way to define the set of logical truths. He dismisses the proposal to define analytically true sentences as those that could be reduced to truths of logic by substitution of synonyms for synonyms on the ground that the notion of synonymy could not be adequately clarified. To Quine logical truths are subject to revision. An agreement over logical expressions or linguistic structure would commit us to the existence of a determinate class of logical truths. Kripke [26, p.15] argues that there is no inconsistency in maintaining that there are objective synonymy relations, and there are no pure semantic facts. We can insist that synonymy relations hold in virtue of

the way expressions are used, and that the contributions which convention and factual knowledge make to the use of expressions cannot be disentangled.

But Quine looks at this issue from a different angle. Quine [11] argues that although knowing a language involves knowing the grammar and although the logical truths are tied to the grammar and likely to be agreed on by all who know the language, it does not follow that it is language that makes logical truths true. Logical truths are not true by language alone. I think that logically true sentences in translation can be known purely by knowing their structures and they are true purely in virtue of their utterances.

It seems that Quine links meaningfulness with utility in communication which, in turn, is explicable in terms of propositional attitudes. He claims that meaning lacks explanation power and it can not be defined or analyzed in acceptable terms. I believe that human languages should be treated as the complex of present dispositions to behavior in which speakers of the same language have perforce come to resemble one another. Each bit of behavior results from the interaction of a complex mechanism with the environment. Quine [4, pp. 11-25,26] contends that sentences stand on complex relations of interconnections with other sentences. In his essay "Methodological Relations on Current Linguistic Theory", Quine [6,pp. 386-98] takes issue with Chomsky where he mentions dispositions to make or accept certain transformations and not others. But Chomsky [16,p.4] refuses the concept that language is a complex of dispositions. He believes that a person's dispositions to behavior can not be regarded as the product of some limited department of their mental life. Chomsky views dispositions as resulting from the combined workings of the totality.

In conclusion I hold that there can be no reason to assume that any two people who speak the same language will have exactly the same verbal dispositions. This is very much true in any translation act. Because translation is a matter of a whole scheme meeting a complex totality of conditions, no body can specify the actual constraints on translation. In translation it will always be possible to produce incompatible construals of logical connectives. Translation persists as a very rough approximation of what has been said and intended originally.

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طيف من الخيارات في الترجمة

عاطف فالح يوسف

أستاذ مساعد، قسم اللغات الأوروبية والترجمة،

كلية اللغات والترجمة، جامعة الملك سعود،

الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

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ملخص البحث. ساهمت وجهات النظر التي طرحها كواين والمتعلقة بحقائق وقيم الترجمة في فتح المجال أمام طروحات جديدة تتعلق بماهية عمل الترجمة. وتأييدا لوجهات نظر كواين يعرض هذا البحث طيفا من الخيارات المختلفة والمتعلقة بما هو منطقي في سياق الترجمة وكذلك بالأراء الفلسفية الجدلية الخاصة بسياق الترجمة بشكل عام.

يؤكد هذا البحث على أن السبب الكامن وراء عدم تحديد ماهية الترجمة هو أن الناس ينهجون أنماط افتراضية متعددة وخاصة بالترجمة، وأن هذه الافتراضات تتكشف في ميول ونزعات مختلفة ومتعددة بعض الشيء.

يستخلص هذا البحث أن الترجمة هي نظام متكامل بشتمل على مجمل شروط متداخلة مع بعضها البعض، ولأنه من الممكن دائما طرح علاقات منطقية قابلة للإعراب والتفسير، فإن أمر تحديد الضوابط الفعلية للترجمة سيبقى موضوعا منثيرا للجدل، فالترجمة الصحيحة للجملة ما هي إلا ترجمة غير مطلقة ومنبثقة بشكل نسبي من منظومة فكرية شاملة لماهية الترجمة ككل.