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The Translation Process: A View of the Mind¹

Ali Darwish

In the last few decades, much has been written about translation and translation theory drawing upon modern linguistics. The translation models which have been formulated in this fashion were mainly post-translation analytical methods and largely pedagogic in approach. These models were concerned with the product of translation and to some extent translator training. They were not, strictly speaking, concerned with the mental processes of regenerating text in another language.

This paper attempts to present a schematic model of the workings of the translator's mind and the cognitive processing of translation.

Translation models

The translation models focused largely on the sentence level and the analysis of deep sentence structure. Nida's (1964) reader-oriented dynamic equivalence started the idea of using sentence grammar for the improvement of Bible translation. Catford (1965) on the other hand, refined Halliday's grammatical 'rank scale' theory to "underline the hypothesis that translation of equivalence depends upon the availability of formal correspondence between linguistic items at different structural levels and ranks" (Hartmann, 1980), and more so at the sentence level.

Beyond the sentence

However, a translation theory or model is not workable if it is confined to the treatment of separate sentences. A translation model should consider the overall textual components, how sentences are interlinked and how they depend on one another in a stretch of text to convey the intended meaning. The meaning of a sentence is determined by the different ways the sentence is semantically related to other sentences in the text. Consequently, for two sentences of different languages to be exact translations of each other they must be semantically related to other sentences of their respective languages in text in exactly the same way (Keenan, 1973).

¹ This paper was written in 1989 for the students of the Postgraduate Diploma in Translation and Interpreting at Victoria College, Melbourne, Australia. Republished in Darwish, A (2003). *The Transfer Factor*, Writescape: Melbourne.

Translation as a process

Translation is a complex dichotomous and cumulative process that involves a host of activities drawing upon other disciplines related to language, writing, linguistics and culture. This multi-disciplinary process suggests that three major activities run concomitantly:

- Transfer of data from the source language to the target language
- Synchro-analysis of text and translation and research of subject-matter
- Continuous self-development and learning

Translation as communication

Translation is a communication process that involves the transfer of a message from a source language to a target language. Text linguistics, which is concerned with the way the parts of text are organized and related to one another in order to form a meaningful whole, is useful for the analysis of the translation process and the transfer of meaning from one language to another.

De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) define the text as a communicative occurrence that meets seven standards of textuality. These standards of textual communication are: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. However, according to Widdowson (1979), a text cannot be an occurrence since it has no mechanism of its own, but can only be achieved by a human agency. It does not itself communicate, but rather provides the means of achieving communication. Moreover, Hatim defines a text as a stretch of linguistic material that maps on the surface a set of mutually relevant communicative intentions.

Text typology

Hatim's (1984) text typological approach to translation, though pedagogic in essence (i.e. concerned mainly with syllabus design for translator training) provides a macro-structure of the translation process which takes translation beyond the sentence level analysis; it "subsumes the interdisciplinary study of text in context carried out within stylistics (and foundational disciplines such as Rhetoric and Exegesis), discourse and conversational analysis, ethnomethodology, as well as recent attempts at developing text grammars within a science of text" Hatim (1984).

Types of text

Reiss (1971, 1976) suggests that there are basically three types of text, according to whether they place emphasis on content, form, or appeal. Similarly, Nida (1975) distinguishes between the expressive, informative and imperative functions of text, adding that the reader will often be totally reliant on context to determine how to interpret a particular text.

Naturally, language is used for the framing of thoughts and for the conveyance of thoughts for some purpose in social interaction Halliday and Hasan (1976). Language serves for the expression of the speaker's experience of the real world, including the inner world of his own consciousness.

In the light of this definition of the purpose of language, the classification of text into three major contextual foci 1) exposition, 2) argumentative, and 3) instructional, and the breakdown of text into elements making a cohesive whole while maintaining an overall view of text in context provide a synchro-analytical approach to the translation process.

How translation works

The most important step in translation theory is to go beyond the comparison of different textual versions and linguistic systems towards an understanding of how translation operates

in totality of all communicative interaction, how communication can take place when different codes are involved, and what the mediating translator does to bring about communication in the target language Hartmann (1980).

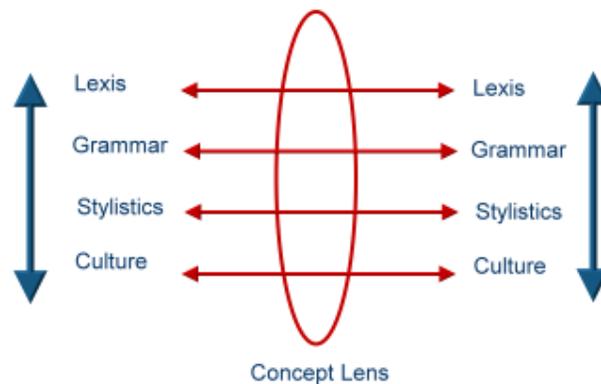
According to Catford (1965), meaning is the property of a language. A source language text has a source language meaning and a target language text has a target language meaning — a Japanese text, for instance, has Japanese meaning (as well as Japanese phonology, graphology, grammar and lexis), and an English equivalent has an English meaning.

Taking this a step further, concepts are the property of the mind - they have no language. Meaning which is the property of a language is manifested through language and embodied in language. Concepts on the other hand, reside in the mind, outside language. As such, they are universal and therefore transferable and translatable.

A view of the translator's mind

In the translation process, the translator possesses two sets of parallel linguistic and cultural repertoires. Each repertoire has a subset of components and units with codes and flags embedded in each one of them. When the translation analysis begins, the two parallel repertoires move constantly to match and replace lexis, grammar, stylistics, phonology, cultural and situational equivalents and to give universal concepts language properties.

In the transfer of text from the source language to the target language, all (or nearly all) the attributes of text/discourse travel from one repertoire to the other through the Concept "lens", which is also in constant focusing converting concepts invoked by the flagged attributes in context in the source language repertoire through the activation of matching attributes in the target language. This binary action-reflex mechanism results in the translation product. The process can be further illustrated by the following model.



The travel path is not always in one direction. It is in fact bi-directional even when translation occurs in one direction. The action-reflex mechanism works like a pendulum shifting back and forth from one language set to the other, with the translator constantly referring back to the source text.

This process is a 3-dimensional activity involving:

- Text analysis; meaning, register, style, rhetoric etc.
- Translation
- Rearrangement

As mentioned earlier, translation is a cumulative process. The more experienced and better equipped a translator is, the faster the action-reflex movement will be.

A decision-making process

In this context, translation can be defined as a continuous decision-making process that is affected by the degree of indeterminacy a source language text might present. The clearer the information in the text the easier and more decisive the matching and focusing process becomes.

With this in mind, analyzing the text in context determines the interrelationship of sentences in text and their overall communicative value.

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