
Positioning the Translator: Perspectives and Possibilities

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Abstract

This paper aims to outline the evolution of translation theory conceptually over time. It explores the idea that the translation process presents various opportunities for translators, and the choices made by translators among these options are crucial. While the scope of discussion is limited, the potential for interpretation is boundless. Translators can function as messengers, carriers, interpreters, intruders, source modifiers, or even remain invisible. The author argues that situating the translator within these diverse realms complicates the dynamics of the relationship between source language (SL) and target language (TL) texts in the field of Translation Studies.

Keywords: translators, positioning, possibilities, language (SL), target language (TL)

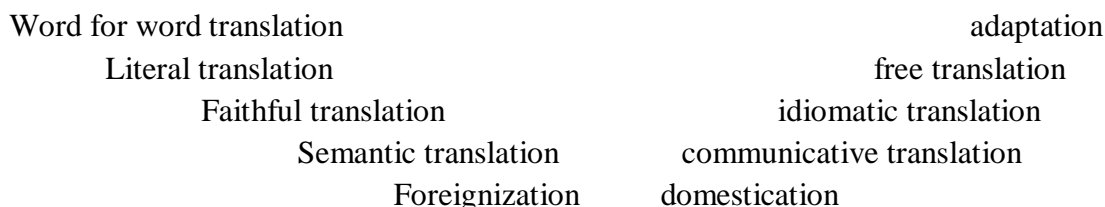
Introduction

The paper under consideration discusses the potential perspectives available to a translator in the translation process, incorporating the conceptual evolution of translation theory over time.

The central idea is that the translation process presents a range of possibilities for the translator, who must make choices from the available options. Although the scope of discussion is limited, the potential for interpretation is vast due to the dialectical relationship between Source Language Text (SLT) and Target Language Text (TLT) concerning fidelity and freedom. This binary, commonly discussed in translation discourse, is text-specific and oriented toward the final product. The aim is to reintegrate the translator into the paradigm from a perspective of alterity.

Different types of texts necessitate distinct translational approaches, and the translator must assess the text's requirements to employ the most effective method. Peter Newmark, in "Approaches to Translation," suggests the existence of two text categories: one demanding semantic translation, aiming to stay close to the semantic and syntactic structures of the SL, and the other requiring communicative translation, seeking to replicate the same effect in the TL as in the SL. Newmark proposes a model to differentiate between semantic and communicative translation (Newmark: 39).

This is generally known as the V diagram of Newmark's theory of translation:



Newmark further contends that every translation, to some extent, must embody both communicative and semantic aspects, encompassing both social and individual dimensions. The variation lies in the emphasis placed on each.

In this context, it becomes the translator's responsibility to discern the possibilities available to them at the functional level. These possibilities include:

1. The translator functioning as a messenger or carrier
2. The translator serving as an interpreter
3. The translator acting as an intruder or source modifier
4. The translator existing as an invisible entity

These considerations play a pivotal role in anchoring the translator within the translation process. The choices made by the translator, in terms of strategy and position, significantly impact the dynamics of the relationship between Source Language Text (SLT) and Target Language Text (TLT).

Translator as a messenger or a carrier

The historical context of the translation process has predominantly assigned the translator the role of a messenger or carrier from the Source Language Text (SLT) to the Target

Language Text (TLT). In an 1813 lecture on translation methods, Friedrich Schleiermacher presented two approaches: one where the translator preserves the author's intentions and guides the reader toward them, and the other where the translator preserves the reader's preferences and brings the author closer to the reader (Venuti: 19). This places the translator in a challenging position, caught between the author's desire for fidelity and the audience's demand for a pleasing rendition.

Etienne Dolet, from the sixteenth century, outlined fundamental principles for translators, emphasizing understanding the author's meaning, possessing perfect knowledge of both languages, avoiding word-for-word translations, using common forms of speech, and selecting words to convey the correct tone (Cited in Nair, Sreedevi. K.1996: 18). These ideas were elaborated by writers like George Chapman and John Dryden, who advocated preserving the original's genius without improvement. Romantic writers distanced themselves from the "mechanical" process of translation, emphasizing the creative genius of the original writer.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, translation gained

recognition as a serious activity. Figures like Matthew Arnold and H.W. Longfellow argued for limiting translator freedom, stating that the translator's duty is to faithfully report the original. I.A. Richards, in "Toward a Theory of Translating" (1953), viewed translation as a complex event and believed translators could be trained to understand the source language text properly.

Eugene Nida defined translation as a process in which a person familiar with both source and target languages decodes the source language message and encodes it into an appropriate equivalent in the target language. Catford emphasized the unidirectional nature of translation and defined it as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent material in another language. Lexicon, or words, plays a major role in this process as carriers of meaning.

Wolfram Wilss identified various terms related to equivalence in translation, including functional equivalence, equivalence in difference, maintenance of translation invariance, equality of textual effect, illusionist or anti-illusionist translation, closest natural equivalent, formal correspondence versus dynamic equivalence, stylistic equivalence, functional invariance, communicative equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence.

Despite the variety of terms, two significant notions are semantic equivalence (content) and structural equivalence (form). Both are crucial in transferring meaning from Source Language Text to Target

Language Text. For instance, in Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov," the use of passive sentences contributes to the novel's semantic import, portraying a society that has lost its face, and the translator must recognize this to ensure both semantic and structural equivalence

In his article, "Correlatives in Translatability", A.P. Andrewskutty has illustrated the problem of translation in providing equivalencies regarding Malayalam to English. He refers to two novels Indulekha and Maantrikappuucha, translated to English

1. (a) ninte vaakku kuRe kaviñnu pooyi (IL: M)

(b) Your tongue ran away with you (IL: E)

1. (a) innattu varuu naan keṭṭitaraam (IL: M)

(b) Come here, I will tie it for you (IL: E)

1. (a) naan oru takarppan aattu veccu koṭuttu phaa ereppee! (MP: M)

(b) Phaaa! I chased him. (MP: E)

1. (a) naan ammacciyooṭu paRannu koṭukkum (MP: M)

(b) I shall tell mother. (MP: E)

"The equivalences are set up at whatever rank appropriate in these instances. The nuances expressed by the use of pooyi, tar-, veccu kotuttu, paRannu kotukkum are not mapped on to structures of similar rank in English...in fact attempt to set up equivalences is done generally in the level of discourse." (1988:10-11).

Additionally, the importance of faithfulness extends not only to the literal surface text but also to the literary sub-text. Chandrika.B discusses the translation of

Malayalam ballads by individuals with diverse backgrounds, such as historians, academics, and literary enthusiasts. She illustrates how each translator approaches the task differently: the historian focuses on a purely historical perspective and provides a literal translation, the academic introduces a touch of Westernization, and the poet takes liberties by emphasizing the subtext of the narrative (Singh: 62-68). As de Beaugrande and Dressler note, "the literal translator breaks down the text into individual elements and substitutes each for a corresponding element in the target language, while the free translator assesses the overall function of the text in discourse and selects elements that can fulfill that function in the target-language context" (1981:216).

Over time, both the form and content of the message have gained significant attention. The translator's role as a carrier in the translation process involves transferring meaning from one set of structured symbols to another, effectively constructing a bridge between them.

Translator as an interpreter

When a portion of text is crucial to the writer's intention but lacks semantic precision, the translator is compelled to interpret. Throughout the cultural history of translation, numerous instances of interpretation, misinterpretation, and distortion have occurred, influenced both by the translator's proficiency and the contemporary cultural context. Translation, typically expressed in modern language, inherently involves interpretation and

lexically reflects the Target Language (TL) culture. Language usage itself can be viewed as a form of translation, according to Vygotsky's classification, which includes thought without language, inner speech, social speech, and language without thought.

The translator plays a crucial role in deciding which strategies to adopt to effectively convey the intended meaning to the target audience. As noted by Sreedevi.K. Nair in her study on the translatability of prose, core issues relate to lexicon, language varieties, and culture. Her study, focused on the translation of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer's novel "Ntuppuppakkoranendarnnu" by R.E. Asher, identifies various strategies employed by the translator to address cultural and linguistic differences. These strategies include borrowing, literal translation, transliteration, omission, addition, substitution, lexical creation, and trancreation, emphasizing that such interventionist strategies aim to enhance the credibility and acceptability of the recreated Target Language Text (TLT).

Translator acting as an intruder or source modifier

Moreover, the translator can take on the role of an intruder into the process, particularly influenced by structuralism and post-structuralism. Ronald Barthes, challenging the centrality of the author, contends that the moment writing begins, a disjunction between the author and text occurs, and the author "enters into his death." The meaning of the text resides in the system of rules and conventions, and the

author's failure to master the language results in language becoming predominant. With the diffusion and dissipation of textual meaning, the translator gains liberation from the periphery, becoming a reader-critic who shapes the work according to their interpretation, ultimately creating a new text in a new linguistic system.

Feminist translation theory explores the interactive space between the Source Text (male) and Target Text (female), interpreting these poles in terms of masculine and feminine. The terminology, such as fidelity in translation and marriage, reflects a cultural complicity. Cannibalistic translational philosophy in Brazil, advocated by Haraldo and Augusto de Campos, seeks to erase boundaries between source and target systems, viewing translation as a two-way transcultural enterprise.

Polysystems theory emphasizes a systematic assessment of the social functions of translation, revealing power relations embedded in textual practice. Translators are increasingly aware of their power in text selection and strategic choices, recognizing that translation occurs within a continuum and is subject to various constraints. Translation reveals the power exerted by one culture over another, prompting a shift in emphasis, known as the "cultural turn," within translation studies. Translators are not 'innocent,' possessing the power to create an image of the original that may differ significantly from the original's intention due to various constraints.

Tymoczko and Gentzler (2002) propose a 'power turn' in translation theory

and research, with a focus on agency and cultural change. In poststructuralist and postcolonial fields, discussions increasingly revolve around the impact of translation on cultural change and its relation to power. The 'cultural turn' in translation studies has thus evolved into a 'power turn,' emphasizing questions of cultural dominance, cultural assertion, and cultural resistance. Professor Susan Bassnett asserts that the fundamental premise is that 'translation is power relations,' emphasizing the dynamic and complex nature of translation, where there is no fixed notion of perfect translation or absolute text.

Translator as an invisible entity

Finally, there's the question of whether the translator should remain visible in the translated work. Ayyappa Paniker raises this issue in his article "The Anxiety of Authenticity," questioning the translator's status: "...But who cares for the translator? He should disappear in the work, shouldn't he? He should not stand between the reader and the original author, why should he? He should achieve the extinction of his personality. He is perhaps most successful when he is least visible, and hence most visible too" (Singh: 45). Translating is likened to parakayapravesa, entering another body, which comes with its own set of challenges and trials.

This sentiment is reminiscent of Venuti's concept of *simpatico*, where the translator should not only get along with the author but should also share an identity with them. The voice heard in a translation based on *simpatico* is always recognized as the

author's, not the translator's or some hybrid of the two (Venuti: 274).

However, Venuti discovered that achieving *simpatico* was not always feasible when he attempted to translate De Angeles's anthology. He struggled to participate vicariously in the reading process, as the poems' opacity, marked by abrupt line breaks, syntactical peculiarities, and a complex mixture of abstraction, metaphor, and dialogue, prevented him from hearing any "coherent speaking voice" (Venuti: 286). There's also an issue of resistance since translated text cannot achieve fluency through transparency. The translator aims to reproduce the discontinuity of the work, as seen in De Angeles's poems, undermining the Anglo-American notion of individualistic authorship. As Venuti states, "the translation establishes an abusive fidelity to the Italian text: on the one hand, the translation resists the transparent aesthetic of Anglo-American culture, which would try to domesticate De Angeles's difficult writing by demanding a fluent strategy; on the other hand, the translation simultaneously creates a resistance in relation to De Angeles's text, qualifying its meaning with additions and subtractions which constitute a 'critical thrust' toward it" (Venuti: 291). For him, *simpatico* reflects a form of "cultural narcissism," identifying only the same culture in foreign writing, the same self in the cultural other.

Conclusion

The translator's positioning within the diverse realms of the translation process adds complexity to the dynamics of the

relationship between Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL) texts in the field of Translation Studies. The proposition here revolves around the potential options available to the translator and the changing foundations upon which they attempt to connect with the target culture. Any repositioning of the translator has the potential to contribute to the existing confusion within the field. Nevertheless, the translator can find assurance in the liberation from historically predetermined categories of fidelity and freedom.

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