
The Question of Translation and Translation Studies¹

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Abstract

Over the centuries, translation as a phenomenon has been addressed in several fields of study: literary studies, cultural studies, linguistics, etc. In the last quarter of the 20th century, scholars' continuous attempt and perseverance to establish a discipline gained momentum in the 1970s, in which the designation *translation studies* was suggested and in its turn widely accepted. It is also claimed that its subsequent development as a separate discipline is a success story of the 1980s. Now, the subject has developed in many parts of the world, and there is a tendency for translation studies to emancipate itself as a discipline through a drastic separation from the other disciplines. While this tendency may be historically understandable, one may be led to a loss of contexts which are crucial to an understanding of the phenomena of translation. This paper will address questions that centre round the state of translation studies development as a discipline in its own right and contact with other disciplines, and those that are associated with the notion of translation itself.

Introduction

Over the centuries, translation as a phenomenon has been addressed in several areas of 'scientific' investigation: philology (literary studies in particular), philosophy, theology, ethnography, anthropology, culture and cultural studies, linguistics, etc. In the last quarter of the 20th century, scholars' continuous

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attempt and perseverance to establish a discipline in its own right gained momentum. At the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen on 21-26 August 1972, James S Holmes talked about the naming of the would-be-born discipline. Of the several names mentioned, he then suggested the designation "translation studies" as "the most appropriate of all those available in English, and its adoption as the standard term for the discipline as a whole would remove a fair amount of confusion and misunderstanding" (Holmes 1988:70). This suggested term was subsequently accepted by many scholars, and has been widely used by speakers and writers of translation across the globe ever since—often as a 'lingua franca' among scholars of different schools. Other terms that may be used in academic circles would refer to particular schools of translation studies to which the users associate themselves. While the question of terminology referring to the 'independent' discipline is 'formally' resolved some problematic theoretical issues within translation studies remain.

It is claimed that the subsequent development of translation studies as a separate discipline is a success story of the 1980s (Bassnett & Lavefere 1995:vii). With the various fields of study that were and are still in one way or another involved in investigating the phenomenon, one would easily understand why Neubert and Shreve use the expression "a house of many rooms" to refer to the wide range of translation studies (Neubert & Shreve 1994). One may also cite the proverb that says "there are many roads to Rome", meaning that in the present context there can be many ways (disciplines) for use as an attempt to arrive at the destination, that is, to achieve an understanding of the translation phenomenon as an object of investigation of translation studies. In this, one critical issue is concerned with the nature of the relationship between translation studies as a discipline in its own 'house' on the one hand and the other disciplines that come in contact with it on the other. Attempts have been made by scholars to explain the nature of their relationship. However, more often than not what seems to be an explanation is not an explanation at all but leads to even more confusion.

Now the subject has developed in many parts of the world, there is a tendency in translation studies to emancipate itself as a discipline through a drastic separation from the contexts of the other disciplines in question (Steiner 1996:4). While this tendency may be historically understandable, one may be led to a loss of contexts which are crucial to an understanding of the phenomena of translation. In this respect, Baker reminds us that translation studies is currently going through a period of fragmentation: of approaches, schools, methodologies (Baker 1996:9), a statement that calls for scholars' attention.

Of the various theoretical issues within translation studies, this paper will address questions that centre round the development state of translation

studies as a discipline in its own right and its points of contact with other disciplines, and those that are associated with the notion of translation itself. This will be formulated under two headings: (1) the state of translation studies, and (2) on translation.

The state of translation studies

Referring to statements by scholars on the state of translation studies development, Tou points out that the "literature on translation tells us about the meandering path of translation theory" (Tou 1997:5). Back in the 1960s, Savory, for example, expressed disappointment by saying that "there are no universally accepted principles of translation" and qualified people "have bequeathed to us a volume of confused thought which must be hard to parallel in other fields of literature" (Savory 1968:49-50). In addition, Levy admitted that there was still no adequate comprehensive approach to translation (Levy 1969:13). In the 1970s, Steiner observed that there was still a deficient degree of understanding of translation (Steiner 1975:238), while Kelly stated that " ... a comprehensive translation theory has proved elusive" (Kelly 1979:1). In the 1980s, Bassnett-McGuire conceded that a systematic translation theory was still in swaddling bands (Basnete-McGuire 1980:1), while Wilss in his blunt statement concluded that there had not been any coherent, agreed upon, intersubjectively valid translation theory (Wilss 1982:11). Frawley too pointed out that translation theory remained "a phantasm" (Frawley 1984:159).

In his review, Tou concedes that scholars have worked hard and tried many different ways and approaches to translation in an attempt to gain insights into its nature (Tou 1997:5). Scholars have tried the so-called [*additive/integrative*] *interdisciplinary* and *multidisciplinary* approaches to translation, but so far their endeavours have had no real success. In Wilss's observation, the root of the difficulty "in designing a paradigm for the science of translation" lies in the multidisciplinary expansion itself (Wilss 1982:65). In this, as de Waard and Nida acknowledge, to describe translation systematically and relate it meaningfully to various disciplines one would lead to the risk of multidisciplinary disintegration (de Waard and Nida 1986:185). The enormity of problems of integrating various disciplines into a unified approach to translation is also acknowledged by Lorsch (cf. Snell-Hornby 1988:31-6):

..... the mere addition of approaches relating to the various relevant disciplines (additive interdisciplinarity) can only reveal certain aspects of the object under investigation. .. But whether and how this [*integrative interdisciplinarity*] can be put into practice is hardly more than an open question for the time being. the problems of integrating

different disciplines into a unified approach are enormous ... (Lorscher 1989:57).

Ironically, despite the enormity of problems and proof of failure, translationists still insist on promoting the necessity of the so-called additive interdisciplinarity, integrative interdisciplinarity, or multidisciplinary, as 'promising' concepts for the investigation of translation (cf. e.g. Kade 1968:36, Hüllen 1976:21, Snell-Hornby 1988:31-6, and Lorscher 1989:57). In Tou's view, these additive inter- and integrative interdisciplinary perspectives and the multidisciplinary perspectives still imply the maintenance of each discipline as the locus of intellectual activity, with translation studies acting as a bridging discipline that accommodates the countless existing disciplines and at the same time 'respect' their existence and values as disciplines of their own, for the investigation of translation phenomenon (cf. Tou 1997:6-7). How can one accommodate various disciplines and integrate them into a unified whole-translation studies as a discipline in its own right-while at the same time still maintain each discipline as the locus of intellectual activity? Apparently, there is a problem.

One of the problems that translationists traditionally deal with is concerned with the question of determining the domain of translation studies (translation theory), and the various translation theories and approaches to translation are in some sense reflections of an attempt to determine the overall semiotic space (domain) of translation studies. In Gutt's observation, there are three major lines of approach to the issue of the domain of translation theory (Gutt 1991:5). The first is an approach that is based on shared intuitions about the domain, without attempting to define it systematically. The second is an approach that delimits the domain by prescriptive definition. The third is a culture-oriented approach that takes translation to be what a culture takes it to be. As far as theory is concerned, Gutt himself argues that relevance theory of communication is adequate to explore and account for translation phenomena and therefore there is no need to have a distinct general theory of translation (Gutt 1990, 1991:vii-viii).

While appreciating the existence of the various translation theories and approaches to translation which may be seen as an indication of human creative power to mean as translationists, Tou states that the availability of the theories and approaches does not necessarily indicate that the life of translation has been investigated in a systematic and comprehensive manner (Tou 1997:8). Tou concludes that so far there have not been any brilliant and comprehensive theories that can account for the life of overall translation phenomena, processes, products and activities. Baker's recent comment on the existence of the ingenious annotation system (*kambun kundoku*) used in Japan around the

ninth century is a clear indication of the theoretical inadequacy of translation (Tou 2003a), in which she states:

“The directly converted the Chinese texts into understandable, if unnatural, Japanese. But was it translation? It seems to be something in between intralingual and interlingual translation, and I do not believe we have any theories that can account for this type of practice either” (Baker in Baker & Malkin 1998:xvii).

One reason why there are various disciplines involved and which intervene with the activities of translation studies is because translation as the object of translation studies represents multidimensional phenomena many of which have traditionally been the objects of the other disciplines in question. At the denotative or textual semiotic level of investigation for example, translation may involve a language (linguistic semiotic) or languages (linguistic semiotics). As early as 1950s, Jakobson referred to a one-language translation as an intralingual translation (*rewording*) and a more-than-one-language translation as an interlingual translation (*translation proper*) (Jakobson 1959:233). In this context, the object of translation studies is concerned with language phenomena, be they intralingual or interlingual phenomena. Thus, a translation event would globally be seen as a translanguaging event, in which a language or languages is or are involved. In this respect, translation studies comes in contact with linguistics, for the object of linguistics is language phenomena. Thus, scholars like Catford would argue that translation must draw upon a general linguistic theory, since “the analysis and description of translation processes must make considerable use of categories set up for the description of languages” (1965:vii).

Still at the denotative semiotic level of investigation, translation may involve not only a language or languages but also a nonlanguage (nonlinguistic or nonlanguages (nonlinguistic semiotics). Back in the 1950s, Jakobson used the term “intersemiotic translation” (*transmutation*) to refer to a translation that involves both a language and a nonlanguage (Jakobson 1959:233). This latter type implies that in translation studies there is a need for systematic investigations of not only linguistic semiotic meanings, systems and representations-to which linguistics has something to offer-but also nonlinguistic semiotic meanings, systems and representations-to which other disciplines have things to offer. Jakobson’s basic classification of translation types surely needs to be developed, alongside the wide-ranging complexity and development of our changing world that always brings about the increasing demand for a greater variety of needs, one of which is the human/human-involved translation.

Human/human-involved translation phenomena involves not only denotative or textual semiotic meanings, systems and representations but also connotative or contextual semiotic meanings, systems and representations. (For relevant discussion of denotative and connotative semiotics, see for example Martin 1984, 1992, Matthiessen 1993 and Tou 1997). In this, one motif that lies behind the involvement and intervention of other disciplines in translation studies such as "cultural studies" is the need for an understanding of the higher level (i.e. connotative or contextual) semiotic meanings, systems and representations. As a matter of fact, the linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic aspects and dimensions that reside in the denotative semiotic space are embedded within the higher semiotic aspects and dimensions that reside in the connotative semiotic space, within the overall semiotic universe of translation.

It is the view of the present paper that not only do denotative semiotic variables occur and make meanings in translation but they also influence and are influenced by connotative semiotic variables which are stratally situational, cultural, ideological and *dienic* or religious (cf. Martin 1992:496 and Sinar 2002:80). Translationists need to construct and develop a theory that can account for all denotative and connotative semiotic variables in the overall semiotic space of translation in question. In this respect, what is at issue is not so much concerned with what theoretical paradigms are involved in translation studies but how relevant theoretical paradigms complement each other for a better understanding of translation meanings, systems and representations. The perspective that needs to be taken in investigating translation as phenomena and its potentiality should not be one of disciplinary, interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary nature but one of transdisciplinary and thematic nature (Tou 1997:138-176).

At the present state of translation studies development, what is expected by many is not what is happening, as has been indicated in Baker's previous statement under the introduction heading. In particular, Baker notices that the greatest rift which is currently threatenmg to reduce the discourse on translation into a series of fault finding exercises and divisive oppositions is that between the linguistics paradigm and cultural studies paradigm (Baker 1996:9), from which the expressions so-called "linguistically-oriented" translation studies as opposed to "culturally-oriented" translation studies emerge. Catford for example says that "translation has to do with language" (Catford 1965:vii) whereas Casagrande states that "one does not translate LANGUAGES, one translates CULTURES" (Casagrande 1954:338). Other competing theoretical paradigms entering into the arena of translation studies are observable in terminological expressions used that are typically associated with particular disciplines, for instance expressions such as "philologically-oriented" or, "theologically-

- (2) "Translation may be defined as follows: *the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)*" (italic as original) (Catford 1965:20).
- (3) "Translation is an equivalent of thought that lies behind its different verbal expressions" (Savory 1968:13).
- (4) "Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of source-language message . . . in terms of meaning and style" (Nida & Taber 1969:12).
- (5) "Translation is the replacement of a representation of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in a second language" (Hartmann & Stork 1972:713).
- (6) ". . . translation consists of transferring the *meaning* of the source language into the receptor language. . . It is *meaning* which is being transferred and must be held constant. Only the *form* changes" (Larson 1984:3).
- (7) "*Translation* means "recodification." . . Translation is the reduction of coded input into another code, . . . Since every translation is a recodification, the act of translation involves at least two decodes [*matrix code and target code*]" (italics as original) (Frawley 1984:160-1).
- (8) "To translate means to express in another language the content of a given text. The objective of translation is to replace the form and to preserve the content of the text. Translation is thus form manipulation with reference to content" (Papegaaij & Schubert 1988:11).
- (9) "As language itself is a translation, the act of recreating language through the reading process constitutes another form of translation" (Schulte & Biguenet 1992:9).
- (10) "Reading is already translation, and translation is translation for the second time" (Gadamer in Schulte & Biguenet 1992:9).
- (11) " . . . all acts of communication are acts of translation" (Schulte & Biguenet 1992:9).
- (12) "When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate; the child who asks his mother the meaning of a word is really asking her to translate the unfamiliar term into the simple words he already knows" (Paz 1992:152).
- (13) "Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself . . . is already a translation- first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase" (Paz 1992:154).
- (14) ". . . translation is . . . implicit *every* act of communication, in the emission and reception of each and every mode of meaning, be it in the widest

semiotic sense or in more specifically verbal exchanges" (italics as original) (Steiner 1992:xii).

- (15) "Translation is, or course, a rewriting of an original text" (Basnett & Lefevere 1995:vii).
- (16) "Translation can be seen as (co-) generation of texts under specific constraints: relative stability of some situational factors and therefore register, and classically, but not necessarily, change of language and (context of) culture" (Steiner 1996:103).

From the definitional statements above, it may be inferred that there is one thing that the statements all have in common: that they are all statements that are performed by humans, not by nonhumans or other species. Secondly, most statements take translation to mean something that is strictly concerned with language, which in this case is human language. In other words, translation is taken primarily-if not obligatorily-to mean a kind of human communication using language ('language' in expressions such as "body language" is nonlanguage). Furthermore, most statements treat translation as a particular kind of interlinguistic semiotic communication that typically involves at least two texts in two different languages that carry 'equivalent' meaning. This sense of translation may represent the traditionally understood notion of translation.

A few of the above statements explicitly or implicitly offer a wider sense of translation with respect to the kind(s) of semiotic(s) involved, seeing translation as something that may be linguistic or linguistic/nonlinguistic. In this view, if translation is something linguistic, it would be either intralinguistic or interlinguistic semiotic translation. If it is something linguistic/nonlinguistic, it would be interlinguistic/nonlinguistic semiotic translation. This classification of translation phenomena would be roughly equivalent to Jakobson's (1959:233) intralingual translation, interlingual translation and intersemiotic translation. It should also be noted that the hermeneutically-oriented perspective, as was represented by scholars such as Gadamer (in Schulte & Biguenet 1992:9), Paz and Steiner referred to above, applies a subjective or insider method of interpretation on translation, seeing any act of communication as an act of translation. In this view, there would be no human communicative activity which is not translation, and the hermeneuts would regard the generally understood notion of translation as translation of translation (translation for the second time) or perhaps even as translation of translation of translation.

Translation as text that is seen simply as a kind of linguistic semiotic text that is derived from a previously occurring linguistic semiotic text, as has been explicitly or implicitly indicated by most statements above, raises doubts about understanding of translation phenomena. If there is a linguistic semiotic

text referred to as a translated text (translation) as it were, one may wonder what lies behind a translated text in the first place, which activates, motivates, expands and constrains the translated text in question. The traditional answer would be that it is a source text that lies behind a translated text, from which the translated text is derived and to which it belongs and has to be loyal, and for that matter it is given the status of being a so-called target text, receptor text, or the like. (This is view that is taken particularly by those who adopt a so-called "source-oriented" perspective; the reverse would be a target-oriented perspective). Then, one would allow oneself to be trapped into a vicious circle of talking about naïve notions of equivalence, identicalness, correspondence, sameness, similarity, or the like. Or else, instead of going into the vicious circle of 'equivalence' between the source and the target, one may be inclined to go into the extreme pole of 'untranslatability' of the source in the target. (Until the mid-1970s, the discourse on translation had focused on these two extremes).

In conclusion, as far as the theoretical statements above are concerned, scholars have not offered any theoretical frameworks that substantially address and insightfully underpin the notion of translation as system or potential (trans-system) that lies behind translation as instance or actual (trans-instance) other than offering theoretical statements most of which are inclined to play variants of the same dichotomous source target pendulum of translation (except the hermeneutically-oriented statements). This implies that our understanding of translation phenomena needs to be critically reviewed. A framework that will enable us to investigate translation not only as instance but also and no less importantly as system needs to be established. Unless the 'two sides of the same coin' (translation as instance and system) are put in place, the subject will remain meagre. Particularly for reasons of space, the present paper leaves this question to the readers as food for thought. (For discussion of translation as system (potential) and instance (actual), see Tou 1997).

Concluding remarks

An attempt has been made to address issues that are associated with the question of translation studies as a discipline, and questions that centre around the notion of translation itself. As a relatively new 'discipline in its own right that provides room for other disciplines to play their part', translation studies is still in its developmental phase. Translation studies is more often than not confronted with some problematic theoretical issues hanging around to be resolved. One crucial issue that has to be dealt with is of course the question of translation itself. All scholars agree that the object of translation studies is "translation", but when they are asked what translation really means they have

different answers. While such answers may represent common practice in the world of scholars, they may lead to confusion on the part of people in general. What has been addressed in this paper are issues and controversies in the world of translation studies and translation.

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