

Towards a Comprehensive Representation of the Process of Translation

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Starting from the idea that 'Language' is an instrument, a set of means that enables man to communicate, and that every message can be phrased in many ways or in a different code, some Linguists (see for instance Fedorov and Catford) as well as laymen seem to believe that translation consists 'merely of transforming signs of one code in order to match signs of another code. This implies that translation is considered as a 'mechanistic' operation. However, it is more than that. As any communicative process, translation is a complex one subsuming linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

As an essential 'configuration of the communicative act' (see: Martin, 1982), the process of translation should be envisaged in a framework of an extended communication model. One of the reasons that translation should be incorporated in the research paradigm of the science of communication is that, according to Wilks (1982, 66) "the object of translation is to establish communication between members of different speech communities". Moreover, the structure of the communication process may serve as a general framework to the process of translation and as a theoretical 'springboard' for a theory of translation.

Communication is referred to and defined as "the transmission of information between a sender and a receiver using a signalling

system" (Crystal, 1980:70). This definition applies to any type of communication: written / spoken language, road signals, sign language, etc. In linguistic contexts, language is the signalling system involved in the communication. It may be written or spoken, the sender may be the writer or the speaker, and the receiver may be the reader or the hearer.

The basic components of the communication process, that is, the sender, the message, and the receiver are usually represented in the following manner:



Fig. 1: Generalized Communication Model

Following this diagram, communication is seen as the transfer of information (message) from one person (the sender) to another (the receiver) through a channel (phonic or graphic medium) in a coded form. This is the most general view of communication. However, the model illustrated above is limited in that it does not show the relationship between the sender, the receiver, and the message as referring to a certain reality in a certain context shared by both participants in the communication.

However, in linguistic contexts, communication is much more complex than a simple transfer of a message from a sender to a receiver as is suggested in the above model. An extended model of communication may highlight the important elements involved in the process and the activities associated with each participant, and may clarify the process of linguistic communication (see fig. 2). The sender's intentions and thoughts constitute the message which is coded (according to language rules and norms), carried through a channel (sound / script), and finally reached the

receiver who identifies the signals (phonemes / words), understands their combination, interprets them within a certain context, and may or may not react to the message. 'Noise', a term borrowed from information theory, may be added to the model to mean all the unintended distortions added to the signals.

It lies within the sender-receiver continuum. In linguistic contexts, these unintended distortions added to the message may be represented by such interferences as phonological deviations, graphological errors, socio-educative differences between the participants, etc.

Communication may be said to be established between the sender and the receiver when the latter received it and comprehends the message. This can only be achieved if the code into which the message is put is known to both participants. As Jakobson (1971 b:573) puts it "a common code is their (the interlocutors) communication tool which underlies and makes possible the exchange of message".

Moreover, the sender has to select the signs from his linguistic repertory and formulate the message in such a way as to be easily intercepted and understood by the receiver.

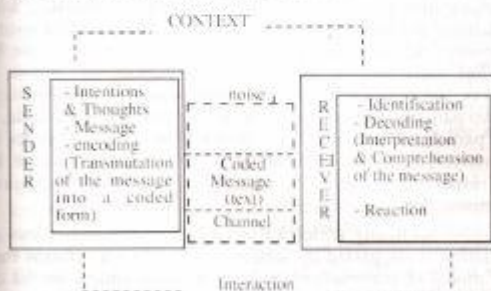


Fig. 2 Extended Communication Model.

Generally speaking, communication between two English-speaking individuals, for instance, can take place because they share the same language. Moreover, communication "stands the best chances of success when the individuals belong to the same group" (James, 1981, 122), especially when the members of this group share, in addition to a common linguistic code, the same culture, social status, etc. To use Jakobson's terminology (1971.b), this type of communication is 'intralingual' because it occurs within a linguistic system common to both the sender and the receiver.

However, communication in linguistic contexts may not be established between two individuals speaking different languages unless there is a third participant in the communication process, a mediator who decodes the sender's message and encodes it in the receiver's code. The mediation, in this case, is usually done by a translator or an interpreter. This type of communication is labelled 'interlingual' by Jakobson.

In the present study, the process of translation is considered to be an essential part of an interlingual communication process as indicated by Jakobson. The two main participants in the communication process, that is, the sender and the receiver, will be assumed not to share the same linguistic system. As a result, the sender's message cannot be comprehended by the receiver. In addition, since any message is, primarily, directed towards a receiver, and in order to establish a communication link between the two participants who do not share the same linguistic code, a third participant who is competent in the two linguistic codes is imperatively needed to establish the communication exchange. In this respect, translation is viewed as vital to interlingual communication.

A more totalising notion of any type of communication as translation is suggested by Steiner (1975, 45) who claims that "any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation". He believes that all processes of verbal understanding can usefully be called translation. He, thus,

considers that "all procedures of expressive articulation and interpretative reception are translational" (Steiner, 1975, 227). Along this line, de Beaugrande (1980, 25) considers the understanding of texts as being "a kind of translation in its own right".

This totalising notion of translation is best illustrated by Octavio Paz (1970, 38) who claims that all texts are translations of translations:

"Each text is unique, yet, at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language it self is essentially a translation. In the first place it translates from the non-verbal world. Then, too, each sign, each sentence, is the translation of another sign, another sentence".

This reasoning is similar to Steiner's claim presented above. This same view is not new; Humboldt and Novalis declared that any type of communication is translation.

They argued that if we take an individual, we find that his utterance is no more than a translation of his thoughts. The obverse of steiner's claim would still be valid: any model of translation is a model of communication. Both translation and communication take into consideration the three main components, namely the sender of the message, the message itself, and the receiver of the message.

Translation, in the broader sense, is involved in any communication process. It is represented by the coding and the decoding of the message. For Jakobson (1971, b) intralingual and interlingual communication are types of translation. The former is "a rewording or an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language" (Jakobson, 1971, 261); that is from message to code within one language code. It is

also, as Nida (1974, 47) puts it "another way of saying the same thing in the same language". The seconde type is 'translation proper' or "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (Jakobson, 1971b, 261). That is, from message in one language code in another code. A third type of translation distinguished by Jakobson is 'intersemiotic translation' or 'transmutation' which he defines as 'an interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal sign system' (op. cit). Thus, we may say that translation, according to Jakobson and Steiner, can be equated to any type of communication process be it verbal or non-verbal.

One obvious difference between intralingual and interlingual communication is the introduction, in the latter, of a third participant between the sender and the receiver of the message, and a second language. In this respect, translation can be seen as "a process of communication in which the translator is interposed between a transmitter and a receiver who uses a different language to carry out a code conversion between them" (see M. van Dijk 1983).

As an essential part of the interlingual communication process, translation should be considered as a multidisciplinary process which may benefit from the achievements and findings of linguistics, psycholinguistics, semiotics, etc. In this respect, a full understanding of how language and the communication process work may help in understanding the intricacies of the process of translation.

The interlingual communication process is primarily based on the same model as intralingual communication process. This approach puts translation in the framework of communication theory, it views translation, as Hartmann (1980, 55) puts it, as "a directional process of communication mediation" where the translator is in a peculiar situation of being a receiver and a sender of the message at the same times.

In equating translation with intralingual communication, Steiner (1975) underestimates the complexity of translation and the specific problems involved in the process.

Basically, translation is viewed as a decoding and encoding activity; that is, a code - switching operation (see Hartmann, 1980). However, this operation is much more complex because the translator, as a mediator, is at the same time a receiver as well as a sender. This double role involves a decoding and encoding activity; a task which is complex and constitutes a tangled network of different operation involving linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

The mental processes of decoding and encoding messages are non-observable phenomena. Hence, the study of the process of translation in its entirety was, for a long time, neglected. Primarily, translation is seen as a mediation which undergoes two main overlapping phases, namely analysis and synthesis. These phases can be investigated through a retrospective reconstruction of the process on the basis of the relationship between SLT (input) and TLT (out-put). A third operation which is non - observable as a phenomenon is that of transfer which lies in the area of overlap between analysis and synthesis. The study of this phase requires further research which would draw upon such disciplines as psychology, neurology, psycholinguistic, and other related fields.

The process of translation is, undoubtedly one of the best examples that show the complexity of human communication. Interlingual communication is a complex and 'all embracing process' (Nida, 1978, 118). Its complexity is intensified by the following dichotomies: a) SL vs. TL (concerning norms, conventions cultures, etc.), b) SL vs. TL, reader expectations, and c) write (First sender) Vs. translator (second sender).

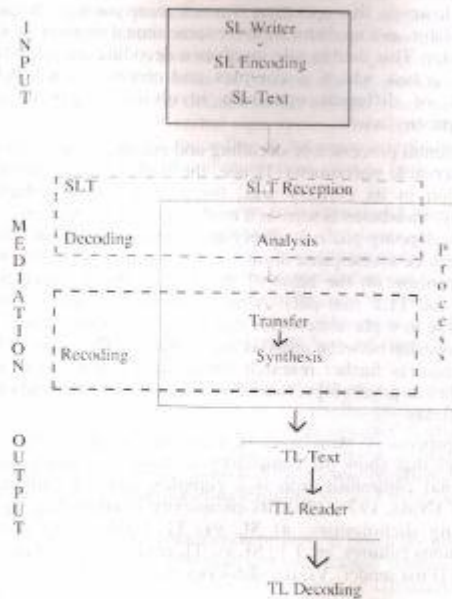


Fig.3 The Process of Translation as an Interlingual Communication process.

As is shown in fig. 3, the writer's message encoded in the SL system is received by the translator who, after a process of analysis and synthesis, recodes the message in the TL to be read and interpreted by the TL reader. It should be noted, however, that the process of analysis and synthesis do not take place successively in the translator's brain.

A comprehensive representation of the translation process should be explicative and analytical. It should be flexible in order to allow adaptation and evolution. It is true that languages are infinitely complex and any linguistic model is bound to be only a tool which enables us to understand, at least partially, the complexity of the process of translation. However, no model should view translation as a purely mechanistic process.

The aim of the present study is to propose an extended and analytical representation of the process of translation with an attempt to balance the two main tendencies: SLT-oriented translation and TL-reader-oriented translation. A representation of the process of translation based on a modified and extended communication model may be of help in seeking to represent an adequate transfer of a message from SLT writer to TL reader.

To avoid a communication breakdown between the two main indirect participants in the communication through translation (the SL writer and the TL reader), the translator should attempt to reproduce the SL message into the TL taking into consideration not only linguistic and semantic factors but pragmatic and extra-linguistic factors as well. In other words, as Wills (1982:66) suggests:

"It is the translator's job in a communication process to correlate the intentions of S (sender) with that of R (receiver), while doing this, he must take into account all available information on SLT. The conditions under which it originated and the functional perspectives at which it aims".

The process of translation involves a great deal of non-linguistic factors. It is obvious that it is based mainly on some internal and non-observable phenomena. However, 'translation theory', for long, dealt mainly with linguistic matters excluding the role of the translator, the human element which manifests itself in all aspects of the process.

As was suggested earlier, the process of translation can be divided into two main phases: analysis and synthesis. The area of overlap of these two phases constitutes the transfer phase which is described by Nida (1969: 99) as "the focal point of the translation process". Hence, any approach to translation should not confine itself solely to observable phenomena but should consider other factors of mental and extralinguistic nature. Along this line, more psycholinguistic research is needed to unravel the different mental processes involved in translation, especially those concerning the transfer of meaning from SL to TL. The problem of representing this transfer of meaning is mainly due to the problem of comprehending the nature of thought in its abstract form. The essence of translation is, thus, more complex involving areas of no direct connection with linguistics.

As for the other phases of the process, the analysis phase is mainly a phase of understanding (from SL form to meaning) in which the SLT is analysed at the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, textual, and stylistic levels. The synthesis phase is one of reconstruction (from meaning to TL form) in which the SLT which has been analysed is reproduced in the target language passing through an intermediary stage namely the transfer phase.

In practice, the different phases of the process overlap and give the impression that translation is almost an instantaneous operation.

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