

The Development of Translation Theory

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Abstract Based on the underlying issue controversies and concerns, the principles espoused and the stand of leading translation authorities, a periodization of the development of translation theory is proposed. Five major periods are presented, from ancient times to the present. The estimated dates given represent heights in the consideration of issues in translation or period of dominance of certain issues. Even as some of these issues cut across periods, the heights should circumscribe the limitations and breadth of the various theoretical periods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human knowledge in the various fields and disciplines, as Bertrand Russell aptly views it, in its totality, emerges with an irregular contour configuration. In certain disciplines, knowledge, theoretical and applied, has moved the frontier of knowledge very far from the centre, in others, progress and the distance from the centre have been less than spectacular. Whatever has been the case in one's discipline, these developments, particularly to students and practitioners of the discipline and more so to its theoreticians, are of great interest. The benefits of such intimacy with theoretical developments was articulated, as only the truly great can express humility and gratitude, by Isaac Newton when he said, "If I have seen further than others, it was because I stood upon the shoulders of giants."

With such a long established tradition as translation has — its earliest confirmed origins dating as far back as the third millennium B.C. — is it possible to present the outlines of the development of translation theory? Can the issue concerns/controversies, the principles espoused, and the stand of leading authorities assist in the periodisation of the development of translation theory? What do writers on this subject say?

We examine these points.

2. TRANSLATION THEORY AND PERIODIZATION

Towards a periodization of the theoretical development of translation a number of writers have suggested various possibilities. Nida (1964) presents two periods, (a) Third millennium B.C. to the Renaissance; and (b) Renaissance to the Present. Discussing "A New Concept in Translating," Nida and Taber (1974) present a dichotomy in theoretical emphasis, namely, the old focus which was on "the form of the message, and transla-

tors took delight in being able to reproduce stylistic specialties, e.g., rhythms, rhymes, play on words, chiasmus, parallelism and unusual grammatical structures" and the new focus, i.e., "from the form of the message to the response of the receptor." Ludskanov (1975: 8) offers four periods in the history of translation theory, with "each advance . . . brought about by an extension of the kinds of text (genres) that had to be translated", namely (a) Literal Translation from 1000 B.C. to the Middle Ages, where religious texts were considered sacred, (b) Translation of Meaning with little consideration for form, a position Ludskanov attributes to Cicero (no dates are offered but if the Middle Ages is from 600 to 1500 A.D., then this period should be 1600 to 1700) except that Cicero, the Roman Stoic philosopher, was around 106-43 B.C.; (c) "Free" Translation, which he identifies as reaching its height in the eighteenth century in France and may be dated 1700 to 1800 (a period when "aesthetic classicism preached the concept of ideal beauty; therefore, the translator should try to improve on the original in conformity with this ideal, and he had the right to make the necessary changes in the text") and (d) "Adequate" Translation from the nineteenth century to the present, where the "translator should respect the author . . . [and] aim to preserve content and form." This periodization, Ludskanov admits, is "grossly oversimplified and far from discrete; all the types of translation mentioned continue to be practised down to the present day, but each period is characterized by the dominance of one type."

In his "A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation of Theories of Translation", Nida (1976) sees translation theory as consisting of two major developments: (a) Philological theories with characterized translation theory prior to World War II, with its traditional lists of precepts for the translator to follow and finding articulation in such works as H. Belloo, *On Translation* (1931); E. Cary and R. Jumpselt (eds.), *Quality in Translation* (1963) containing the papers of the third International Congress of the International Federation of Translators; the great majority of articles in *Babel*, and (b) Linguistic theories after World War II which focused on comparative/contrastive studies of the linguistic structures of the languages concerned (the source and target languages in the translation). The linguistic translation theories drew from structural grammar and generative grammar linguistic models and were formulated by a number of linguists like Nida (1964), Catford (1965), Nida and Taber (1974), Newmark (1981), Larson (1984) and others.

Progress in the development of linguistic theories of translation, Nida (1976:69) attributes to: (a) the application of the rapidly expanding science of linguistics to several different language learning, cognitive anthropology, semiotics, and the teaching of skills in translating and interpreting; and (b) machine translation."

Newmark (1981), in calling attention to significant theoretical positions and their dates, implies a periodization, but does not offer

Based then on the theoretical high points and development and the suggested above, the following periodization of the development of translation theory is proposed.

1 *Literal vs. Sense Translation. Ancient Times to the 13th Century A.D.*

This is an immensely long period, but translators of this period were essentially governed by a literal framework, particularly those engaged in religious translation. Talmud and the Jewish translators believed that "literal translation" was the only way to accuracy. In agreement with them were the medieval philosophical and theological translators. Translation was based on the "letter" of the text, instead of the "Spirit" of the material. An example usually cited is the Aquila translation of the Old Testments (125 A.D.), for the "composed barbarous Greek in an attempt to be faithful to the Hebrew original" (Nida, 1964: 23). Even the Latin translations of the New Testament, to Wikgren (1947:2), were literal and some downright bad Greek.

On the opposite theoretical position, those who stood for sense translation, found an early leader in Cicero (55 B.C) who criticized literal translation as the work of the unskilled. Cicero's theory laid heavy emphasis on the meaning, the text and the spirit of the text. He declared, chastising the word-for-word translators, 'what men like you . . . call fidelity in translation, the learned term pestilent minute-ness . . . it is hard to preserve in a translation the charm of expressions which in another language is most felicitous . . . If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity, I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator,' quoted by Nida (1964:13).

Cicero's framework found stylistic direction in St. Jerome (400) who was commissioned by Pope Damasus to translate the New Testament. Jerome received early support for his theory in Symmachus, who translated at the end of the second century A.D. He described him as having given "the sense of the scripture, not in literal language, as Aquila did" (Grant, 1961:25). Also taking the Sense Translation position was Venerable Bede in his translation of the Gospel of John, one of the few exceptions to the "stiff, ecclesiastical Latin" of the period (Nidas, 1964:13).

2. *Spirit, Intent and Colloquial Translation. 14th to the 16th Century*

Martin Luther was the dominant figure of this period and stood for full intelligibility in translation and set up translation principles governing: (a) shifts of word order; (b) employment of modal auxiliaries; (c) introduction of connectives when these are required; (d) suppression of Greek or Hebrew terms which had no acceptable equivalent in German; (e)

use of phrases where necessary to translate single words in the original; (f) shifts of metaphores to exegetical accuracy and textual variants (Nida, 1964:15). Credited, however, for coming up with the earliest formulation of a theory of translation is Etienne Dolet (1509-1546) who specified five fundamental principles in translation (Cary, 1955 and Nida, 1964). The Dolet translation principles:

- (a) The translator must understand perfectly the content and intention of the author whom he is translating.
- (b) The translator should have a perfect knowledge of the language from which he is translating and an equally excellent knowledge of the language into which he is translating.
- (c) The translator should avoid the tendency to translate word for word, for to do so is to destroy the meaning of the original and to ruin the beauty of the expression.
- (d) The translator should employ the forms of speech in common usage.
- (e) Through his choice and order of words, the translator should produce a total overall effect with appropriate "tone"

Arguing for colloquial translation was William Fulke, who had considerable influence on the translators of the King James Version of the Holy Bible. He insisted that ecclesiastical tradition must give way to common English usage - "to translate precisely but of the Hebrew is not to observe the number of words, but the perfect sense and meaning, as the phrase of our tongue will serve to be understood" (Amos, 1920:60). Representative of the flowering of this period is the Spanish Casiodoro de Reina's translation of the Bible in 1568.

3. *Freedom in Translation - Age of Les Belles Infideles*. 17th to 18th Century

This period represents the farthest swing of the pendulum in freedom in translation theory. It was characterized by unrestrained freedom in the translation of secular works compared to the translation of the Scriptures.

The dominant figure was the poet Abraham Cowley (1656) who stood for "conscious freedom in translation." On translating Pindar, he said, "If a man should undertake to translate Pindar word for word, it would be thought *one Mad-man* has translated another; as may appear, when a person who understands not the original, reads the verbal translation of him into Latin prose, than which nothing seems more raving. I have in these two odes of Pindar taken, left out, and added what I please: nor made it so much my aim to let the reader know precisely what I spoke, as what was his way and manner of speaking" (Nida, 1964:17).

Less extreme than the position of Cowley and his group is that of translation theorists like Dryden (1680) who proposed three types of

translations: (a) metaphrase, a word-for-word and line-by-line type rendering; (b) paraphrase, a translation in which the author's work is kept carefully in view, but in which the sense rather than the words are followed, and (c) imitation, where the translator assumes the liberty not only to vary the words and sense, but also to leave both if the spirit of the original seems to require it. By this classification, Cowley's translations would be called imitations, which Dryden considers as representing the extreme.

Still within the spirit of this period, Alexander Pope says, "no literal translation can be just to an excellent original . . . the fire of the poem is what the translator should principally regard, as it is most likely to expire in his managing" (Nida, 1964:18, referring to Pope, 1715). In 1760 French Batteux sounded a cautious position - while he did not oppose alterations if they were justified, he was deeply concerned with the reproduction of the form. Operating within the same mould also was George Campbell of Aberdeen who published in 1789 a history of the theory of translation where he detailed his differences in principle and practice with Jerome and catalogued the inadequacies of the King James Version of the Bible. Campbell (1789:445-446) gives the following criteria for good translating: (a) give a just representation of the sense of the original, (b) convey into the version, as much as possible, the genius of the language and the author's spirit and manner; and (c) take care that the version has "at least so far the quality of the original performance, as appear natural and easy"

Signalling the swinging back of the pendulum from this theoretical extreme is Alexander Fraser Tytler (1790), Lord of Woodhouselee, an Edinburg Scot. He complained about Dryden's influence and saw too great freedom coming into vogue where "fidelity was but secondary object" and translation was "synonymous with paraphrase" (:45). He does bend a bit, however, when he admits that addition, if fully legitimate, may be allowed, i.e., if it has the "most necessary connection with the original thought, and actually increases its force" and omissions "shall not impair or weaken the original thought" (:28). Tytler set up three principles for translations (a) the translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work; (b) the style and manner or writing should be the same character with that of the original, and (c) the translation should have all the ease of the original composition. In the 1912 edition of his "Essay on the Principles of Translation", he takes the position that a "good translation is one in which the merit of the original work is so completely transferred into another language as to be distinctly apprehended and as thoroughly felt by the native of the country to which that language belongs as it is by those who speak the language of the original work."

4. *Technical Accuracy and Classical Revival in Translation. 19th Century*

The central figure in this period was Matthew Arnold (1862) who proposed that a translation should more or less reproduce the effect of the original for the competent scholar (Nidas, 1964:20). This presaged what some call today psychological translation, or in the model we proposed (Hidalgo, 1985), the *response* which is concerned with pragmatics, the relation of signs and behavior. Arnold underscored simple, direct and noble style in translating great works like those of Homer.

It was during this period that a number of great names came out in favour of technical accuracy, a seeming return to literal translation. Operating in the framework that absolutely believed in staying as close as possible to the original text were Goethe (1813, 1814), Humboldt (1816), Schopenhauer (1859), and Nietzsche (1882).

This position later brought back the attack on literal translation such as those of Magnus (1931) who criticized Arnold for having rules which merely conveyed the text and slighted the spirit of the original. Then, there are those illustrations of the “pernicious effects of a literalistic view of translation” (Nida, 1964:20) of the period such as the English Revised Version (1901), where the “words may be English, but the grammar is not and the sense is quite lacking”, e.g., 2 Corinthians 3:10:

For verily that which hath been made glorious has not been made glorious in this respect, by reason of the glory that surpasseth.

5. *Multidisciplinary View of Translation-Age of Linguistics: 20th Century*

Central in the development of translation theory in this period of linguistics, the scientific study of language: phonology, lexicon, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Related disciplines are very much involved such as anthropology, philosophy, logic, semiotics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, machine translation, literary criticism and stylistics.

Some writers like Prochazka (1942) describe this period as the liberation of translations from philological presuppositions by modern linguistic science. Some linguists and linguistic organizations that have had a tremendous influence in translation theory are, in Europe, Saussure, Hjemslev, Trubetskoy, the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen, the Linguistic Circle of Prague, Firth, Halliday and others; in the United States, Bloomfield, Sapir, Whorf, Jakobson, Lounsbury, Weinreich, Greenberg, Jocs, Hoijer, Voegelin, Nida, the Summer Institute of Linguistics led by Pike and Longacre. Also influencing and enhancing exchange of views and research are the journals: *Babel*, *Meta*, *The Bible Translator* and the various journals in linguistics published in various countries by linguistic associations in the world.

Even as the twentieth century has also come to be known as the "Age of Translation" (Jumplet, 1961) and "reproduction" (Benjamin, 1923), there are those who take a dim view of translation, theory and practice. Questioning the possibility of adequate translation, particularly of poetry, are Croce (1922), the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1937), Valery (1946). This negative position is not helped any by the assessment of the quality of translation which finds that "most versions of modern foreign writers are mere hackwork carelessly executed by incompetent hands" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911). Assessing translation during the pre linguistic period, Newmark (1981:4) observes that the translators "show a gradual transition from a natural or free treatment towards a literal analysis, if not translation of the original, but there is no development of theory, and many of the writers were not aware of each other's work. On the whole, they make no attempt to distinguish types or quality of texts (which are mainly biblical or literary)."

Translation theories that derive from linguistics - comparative, contrastive, interlingual studies - look into language structures, semantics and pragmatics. On focus also are registeres, the problems of languages in contact, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, machine translation, semiotics and related disciplines.

In semiotics, the science of signs, an essential factor in translation theory (in fact some theories derive from semiotics), the major source has been C.S. Peirce (1934), who is considered the founder of this field. Morris (1971) is another major source in semiotics: syntactics - the relation of signs to each other, semantics - the allocation of signs to their real objects, and pragmatics - the relation between signs and their interpreters. The Morris model is the basis of the Leipzig translation theorists (Neubert, 1968, 1972, Kade, 1965, 1968).

Other sources further point to the multidisciplinary nature of translation theory today: communication theory (Wiener, 1948, 1954, Cherry, 1957; Nida and Taber, 1969; Kade, 1968 - all locate translation within the context of the communication theory model); stylistics that deals with the intersection of linguistics and literary criticism (Jakobson, 1960, 1966; Spitzer, 1948); logic and philosophy, particularly ordinary language philosophy which have some bearing with grammatical and lexical aspects of translation. Logic assists translators with truth-value problems of great relevance are Wittgenstein (1958) - the meaning of a word is its use in language; Austin (1963) - the distinction between descriptive and performative sentences; Grice (1975, 1978) - meaning means intention, which plays a critical role in the model proposed by Hidalgo (1985).

Linguistics have been particularly active in translation theory. Nida (1964, 1969, 1974, 1975) reflects the use of linguistic theory in translation - his transformational grammar kernel sentences, semantic analysis and from anthropology, componential analysis; Jumpelt (1961) uses the Trier-

Weigerber field theory on technical texts and distinguishes superordinate and subordinate terms in technical literature; Catford (1965) applies the M.A.K. Halliday systemic grammar to translation theory; Federov (1958, 1968) anchors his theory in structural linguistics; Firth (1968) looks at contextual meaning as the basis of translation theory.

Vinay and Drabernet (1976), in their theoretical work on translation based on linguistics identify seven areas in translation: (a) transliteration; (b) loan translation; (c) literal translation; (d) transposition, (e) modulation; (f) equivalence and adaptation. They propose formal correspondences in translation. Newmark (1981) focuses on translation theory based on linguistic science, emphasizing the relevance of translation theory to the translator's task as he/she deals with the specifics of the translation process; Larson (1984) brings the centrality of meaning in translation, adopting the theory and technique of transformational generative grammar to translation.

The entire work of linguistics today, from the Katz and Fodor (1963) "Structure of a Semantic Theory" to the current research on such areas as speech acts, pragmatics, presuppositions, logic, syntax, and the work of Harris, Halliday, Chomsky, Fillmore, Lakoff, Ross, McCawley, Sadock and others in both transformational grammar and generative semantics are central in translation theory.

3. ON PERIODIZATION OF TRANSLATION THEORY

The periodization proposed here is issue-oriented and theory-based, i.e., the underlying theoretical sources and moorings of the translation theories such as the general dichotomy between philology-based theories and the linguistics-based theories. Revealed in the periodization are the translation theory emphasis and direction, beginning from an extremely conservative position (literal translation-ancient times to the 13th century), moving to a middle position in spirit, intent translation (14th to 16th century), reaching an extreme radical position in total freedom in translation (17th to 18th century), swinging back to the middle position in technical accuracy in translation (19th century) and almost reaching the extreme conservatism of literal translation and finally settling down in the 20th century to the middle position in the multidisciplinary models centrally based on linguistics. Indeed, the movement of translation development is like that of a pendulum. For a more discriminating categorization of the time frames, detailed study of the various theories would be necessary. Perhaps two additional criteria should be used in a periodization - the nature of the theoretical advancement of refinement that each theory brings to translation, both as an art and as a science, and the result of each theory in terms of improved translation. More work remains to be done.

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