Translation: Western Tradition

Linguistic, Functional, Discursive Approaches

This essay will deal with the development in the field of translation, particularly in the field of Translation Studies from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. It will enlist the different areas of study, and describe three approaches to the study of translation. It is important to discuss the development in the field of Translation studies while tracing the tradition in translation because Translation Studies includes the analysis of key texts, enabling students to develop an awareness of the problems of understanding and interpretation. It also involves the development of the analytical, practical, evaluative, aesthetic, and expository skills required in dealing with translation problems. Finally, it includes the development of research skills, practical translation skills, and the ability to develop expertise for managing complex linguistic and cultural issues involved in translation.

- In the beginning, studies of translation were mainly prescriptive and extremely simplistic regarding their approach to meaning. It is important to note that there were far fewer descriptive and explanatory approaches than there are now.

- The debate over literal and free translation went on up to the second half of the 20th century when the need for more systematic analysis of translation was quite apparent, and the only discipline which comprised adequate theoretical and lingual frameworks for handling the above mentioned dichotomies was linguistics. It can be said that in consequence to the debate over 'literal', 'free' and 'faithful' translation, in the 1950s and 1960s more systematic approaches to the study of translation emerged and they were linguistically oriented .

- As Cristina García de Toro points out the major fields that have become a part of Translation Studies, since its recognition as an autonomous discipline in the second half of the twentieth century, are following:
  - ❖ The theories of equivalence and comparisons between languages (based on Linguistics)

- ❖ The functionalist theories
- ❖ The discursive approaches
- ❖ The polysystem theory. Descriptive studies. Norms
- ❖ Cultural studies
- ❖ The philosophical and hermeneutic approaches
- ❖ Corpus studies and the cognitive approaches
- ❖ The integrating and interdisciplinary approaches

The theories of equivalence and comparisons between languages (based on Linguistics):

- During the first period of the so-called modern theories - the 50s and 60s, the studies conducted were essentially concerned with linguistics and with the problem of equivalence. These approaches were based on the application of Structuralism and Generative Grammar, Functional Grammar, and so forth.

- Two important writers are Jakobson ('On linguistic aspects of translation', 1959) and Nida (*Toward a Science of Translation*, 1964).) Jakobson focused his interest on the problem of equivalence of meaning. Owing to his structuralist orientation, he states that the problems of meaning can be explained by the structural differences between languages.

- Nida (1964) borrowed the theoretical concepts and terminology both from semantics and pragmatics and from Chomsky's Generative Transformational Grammar. He distinguished between formal equivalence (author-oriented) and dynamic equivalence (equivalence of effect: reader-oriented), and abandoned the idea that a particular form has a fixed meaning.

- There were studies with comparativist orientation indebted to Structuralism and Generativism. They mostly focus on comparisons between languages. García Yebra (1982), in his study, compared languages on different levels, namely, lexical, morphological and syntactic. On the other hand, authors such as Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Malblanc (1963), and Vázquez Ayora (1977) base their studies on comparative stylistics.

- One of the most significant contributions made by Vinay and Darblennet is their classification of the so-called translation procedures - borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation

- Catford (*A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, 1965) is another significant scholar in this field. He was influenced by the linguistic theories of Firth and Halliday and introduces textual considerations.

Function, relevance, situation and culture are terms that appear in his theoretical frame, specifically in his proposal for textual equivalence

- Nowadays, these approaches to translation have been superseded by approaches and schools that no longer centre their attention exclusively on linguistic systems and put greater emphasis on aspects such as the function of the text, contextual factors, the repercussion of the translated text on the target system and the interrelation between translation and culture.

The Functionalist theories:

- The **functionalist theories**, which appeared in Germany during the seventies and eighties, included a set of new approaches based on a functional, communicative view of translation. Functionality is what determines the translation criteria, that is, its form, the genre, and so forth. The aim is to make the translation functionally communicative. And to do so the translation is placed within its socio-cultural context or placed in relation to society and culture. The functionalist scholars use a key concept: Skopos. Skopos is a technical term used to speak about the purpose of the translation and the 'translational' action (action related to translation). Skopos theory was introduced by Vermeer in the 70s.
  - ❖ Reiss, Vermeer, Holz-Mänttäri and Nord are most important scholars who are considered to have laid the foundations of Skopos theory.
  - ❖ Reiss (1971) begins with the notions of "text type" and "text purpose". When dealing with text types, she bases herself on Bühler's functions of language and talks of informative texts, expressive texts and operative texts; 'audiomedial' texts are also included. In the work by Reiss and Vermeer (1984), the authors also set out from text types and go a step further by proposing specific methods of translation according to the type of text.
  - ❖ Holz-Mänttäri (1984) advocates the theory of translational action. Here, translation is described as a communicative process in which different actors play different roles: the initiator, the commissioner, the ST producer, the TT producer, the TT user, and the TT receiver.
  - ❖ Nord in his work(in 1991 and 1997), gives importance not only to function but also to the relation between the ST and the TT; the nature of this relationship is determined by the Skopos.

The Discursive approaches:

- Between the seventies and the nineties new, linguistic-based approaches appeared that incorporated the new linguistic tendencies, which were more concerned with the context, mainly register analysis, discourse analysis or pragmatics. Among these, some of the most notable include the studies by House, Baker, and of Hatim and Mason.

- The work of House (1977), was later revised in 1997. It worked on and developed further the application of the systemic approaches put forward by Crystal and Davy (1969). She initiated the innovative classification of text types based on the type of translation and not on the type of source text. The author speaks of "overt" translation and "covert" translation. These terms have now become more popularly known as "foreignisation" (foreignising translation) and "domestication" (domesticating translation).

- Baker (1992) also sets out from the premises of systemic functional linguistics, (essentially from the theories of Halliday and Hasan, 1976). This author uses the following classification to establish the most common problems of non-equivalence: 1) the word level, 2) beyond the word, 3) the grammatical level, 4) text level, and 5) pragmatic level. On the first two steps, she deals with the meaning of words and the problems stemming from lexical problems that make it difficult to achieve equivalence. On the grammatical level, she considers aspects that can cause problems such as the number, the gender, the person, the tense and the verbal aspect, or the voice. At the text level, she deals with aspects such as the thematic progression and cohesion; and at the pragmatic level she deals with coherence and the mechanisms that can be employed to achieve it - implicatures, the co-operative principles or the conversational maxims.

- The works of Hatim and Mason (1990 and 1997) were more strongly influenced by the ideas of Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964) and by the notion of language as an act of communication. For Hatim and Mason, language is the true essence of the translator's work and translation is therefore also part of the process of communication between the author of the ST and the reader of the TT.

- Hatim and Mason highlight three dimensions in the context in which textual manifestations take place: 1. The communicative dimension, where they include traits related to dialect and to the usage of language that appear in the text (i.e. registers). 2. The pragmatic dimension, which accounts for the assumptions, implicatures, meanings of speech acts, intentionality and all the other pragmatic features present in the text. 3. The semiotic dimension, which includes

phenomena such as intertextuality and what the authors call *macrosigns*, or socio- textual practices - like text genre, the underlying discourse or ideology, and the textual composition or text itself -, and *microsigns*, or socio -cultural practices that belong to a given community.

Sources:

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