

Role of Semantics in Translation

Newmark and Ogden-Richards

Peter Newmark:

- Peter Newmark has made a major contribution to the theory of translation. In his book *Textbook of Translation* (1987) he has made a distinction between faithful translation, semantic translation and communicative translation. A 'faithful translation', according to Newmark, attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the limits of the target language (TL) grammatical structures. It 'transfers' cultural words and preserves the degree of grammatical and lexical 'abnormality' (deviation from source language or SL norms) in the translation. It attempts to be completely faithful to the intentions and the text-realisation of the SL writer.
- Newmark says that 'Semantic translation' differs from 'faithful translation' only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value (that is, the beautiful and natural sound) of the SL text, compromising on 'meaning' where appropriate. Further, it may translate less important cultural words by culturally neutral third or functional terms but not by cultural equivalents and it may make other small concessions to the readership. The distinction between 'faithful' and 'semantic' translation is that the first is uncompromising and dogmatic, while the second is more flexible, admits the creative exception to 100% fidelity and allows for the translator's intuitive empathy with the original.
- Communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.
- Newmark further says that semantic translation is personal and individual, follows the thought processes of the author, tends to over-translate, pursues nuances of meaning, yet aims to be concise in order to reproduce pragmatic impact. Communicative translation is social, concentrates on the message and the main force of the text, tends to under-translate, to be simple, clear and brief, and is always written in a natural and resourceful style. A semantic translation is normally inferior to its original, as there is both cognitive and pragmatic loss; a communicative translation is often better than its original. Semantic translation has to interpret, a communicative translation to explain.

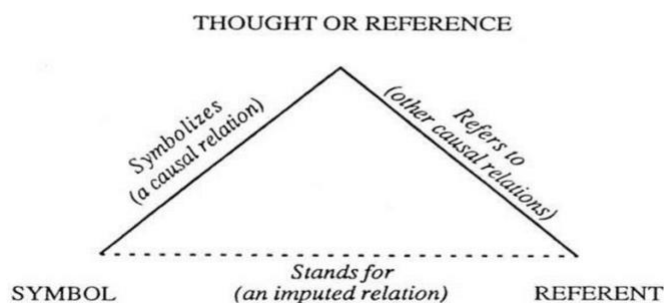
- Newmark makes another general point about translating words. He says that, in principle, since corresponding SL and TL words do not usually have precisely the same semantic range (though many do in cognate languages), the translators are over- or under-translating most of the time, usually the latter. In fact, since in the majority of texts they are more concerned with the message (function) than with the richness of description, and since the meanings of all but technical words are narrowed down in their context, translation correspondence is usually close. One has to keep in mind that a great number of words in one language include and overlap in varying degrees of meaning the words they appear most obviously to translate into another language.

Ogden – Richards Schema :

- In semantics, there are some methods of analyzing the meaning of a word. Scholars have made theories of translation based on the Ogden – Richards model. Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards propose the triangular concept of meaning in which semantics is also related to semiotics, pragmatics and discourse. The point the writers make is that in order to understand the meaning we also need to relate it with the context (pragmatics). Ogden and Richards identified that understanding comes from within the people rather than from the words they just interpret. They set a model called “The Triangle of Reference” for better understanding of how language works and basically it is a theory of signs. The triangle, a diagram, is meant to show the relationship of words with thoughts and things, and it has achieved iconic status in twentieth-century semiotics.
- Instead of focusing on the information that is communicated, Richards wanted to study the meaning of the words. He felt that understanding is the main goal of communication and communication problems result from misunderstanding. One of the ideas behind the Meaning of Meaning Theory is "The Proper Meaning Superstition" (Ogden and Richards, 1923). This is the false belief that every word has an exact, "correct" meaning. Richards says that the Proper Meaning Superstition is false because words mean different things to different people in different situations. This misunderstanding causes problems when two people believe they are talking about the same thing, but actually talk about different things. Another concept that Richards uses is the idea of signs and symbols in communication. Words are examples of such symbols. As Griffen (1997) says symbols

have no natural connection with the things they describe. Words are symbols of something because they have been given meaning. But very often words mean one thing in a certain context and mean another thing in a different context. This is why it is so important to study the context to get a better understanding of the meaning. To come to this better understanding, Richards invented the Semantic Triangle or the Triangle of Reference. This triangle shows the relationship between symbols and their referent. One part of the triangle is the symbol, or the word. Another peak on the triangle is the thought or reference or sense. This is the sense or prior experience or words that one would use to comprehend the referent. The referent, the last part, is the thing that one would picture in one's mind.

Semantic Triangle of Ogden & Richards



- Each of the points in the triangle represents an entity assumed to be involved in an act of reference; the sides in turn illustrate the relations between these entities. A 'symbol', a word or any other type of sign, evokes a 'thought or reference', an idea in the mind of the hearer or perceiver of the sign, which is then directed to a 'referent', some entity or object in the world. What Ogden and Richards suggest through their account is that there is no direct connection between the symbol and its referent. The relation between them is rather 'imputed', as the dotted base of the triangle and its caption tell us. For any act of reference to succeed, it must first pass through the intermediate step of 'thought or reference'.
- An example in integrated agricultural modeling would be the word "wheat". The sense or reference or words to describe the referent can be for example "cereal crop, grain, flour". The referent, the last part, is the thing that one would picture in his mind.

- The translator's action is to translate the words of source language to the words of the target language. Semantic triangle theory is the basic theory that is used to effectively guide the translation practice.

Sources:

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