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Research models across translation studies and a semiotic paradigm

ABSTRACT

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This article attempts to demonstrate the potential of semiotics for translation studies. Even though semiotic paradigms can be observed across certain theories advocated by translation scholars, it seems that a clear and integrated semiotics-based model of translation has not been developed yet. The hypotheses developed in the article may help to answer the question whether it is feasible to draw a relevant model of translation that would include categories for the most significant variables influencing the process of translation. To this end the article offers an analysis of various research models and discusses the potential of a semiotic framework of reference.

Keywords: translation, model, semiotics, concepts, paradigm

1 Semiotics and translation studies

The interrelationship between translation studies and semiotics seems fairly obvious and clear if only for the undisputable co-relation between semiotics (or then semiology) and linguistics advocated by de Saussure (1991), who highlighted the fact that the latter should act only as a part or element of the former, which is much more general in its scope. Much obvious as it may be, semiotics has only been visible in translation studies to a moderate degree. This may be illustrated by a quote made more than twenty years ago: in her seminal monograph devoted to translation and semiotics, Gorlée pointed out that both areas of research had ignored each other for quite a long period of time, which may be quite illogical,

since "both translation studies and semiotic studies address, albeit from different methodological vantage-points, aspects of communication, and both are concerned with the use, interpretation, and manipulation of messages or texts, --that is of signs" (1994:11).

Even though the observations made by Gorlée more than twenty years ago may be still true, it should be acknowledged that there have been scholars attempting at bringing together semiotics and translations studies. Jakobson (1959) can be probably seen as one of the first and most influential scholars to address the semiotic perspective: his tripartite division of translation and the idea of intersemiotic translation have turned into one of the main focal points of interest for translation semioticians. Along the same line, Popovič (1975) and Lawendowski (1978) developed their theories around a more sign-oriented approach: the former perceived translation as an example of metacommunication situated in a semiotics-based context of time and space, whereas the latter argued that translation is a semiolinguistic operation and thus, may include processes of transfer without any intervention of verbal signs.

In the 1980s a similar point of view, yet based on the semiotics of culture, was represented by Even-Zohar (1979) or Toury (1986). Even-Zohar presented his well-known theory of polysystem with a clear systemic and culture-bounded perspective. Toury suggested differentiating between intra- and intersemiotic translation, concentrating on the change of the sign system – thus, Jakobsonian intra- and interlingual translation were considered instances of intrasemiotic transfer.

More recently, a stronger correlation of semiotics and translation studies has been advocated by *inter alia* Torop (2000), Petrilli (2003), Gorlée (2004), Stecconi (2004, 2007) or Gottlieb (2018). Petrilli (2003) argued that every case of translation falls within the scope of intersemiotic translation; Stecconi (2004) attempted to outline the ways in which translation studies can benefit from semiotics, one of them being the fact that semiotics is a general theory of signs and hence, offers a more global framework. Along the same line, Gottlieb (2018) suggested a complex all-encompassing classification of translation practice, listing thirty-four categories.

Throughout the relatively short history of translation studies theoreticians have developed a number of different theories. However, so far it seems that a single and unified theory of translation has not been developed yet. Moreover, it seems that key concepts, such as equivalence, translation unit or text, have been subject to either open negotiations of meaning or academic negligence due to the assumption that they may not be relevant in a certain case. It may be true that a general theory of translation is non-existent, and hence, there seems to be little point in defining the most fundamental concepts with academic rigour. On the other hand, though, Gorlée blamed the language-based nature of translation studies for making it impossible for scholars to arrive at any general theories,

whereas "Decentring of language should be seen in a positive way, meaning that verbal signs are accompanied by, and build upon, nonverbal ones, so that a constant interaction takes place between them" (1994: 227).

2 Common research models across translation studies

The idea of a research model or paradigm is an indispensable element of every domain of science. Although according to Chesterman (2012), translation studies may not have very powerful models at its disposal, it seems that every turn in the domain has yielded various theories and approaches, some of which have undoubtedly shaped the research on translation to a considerable degree.

There are several taxonomies of translation models, which may be found in, e.g. Chesterman (2012) or Hermans (2011). Their taxonomies are rather simplistic and too general, since they do not include all theories; this may be due to the fact that there is such a vast variety of ideas and methodologies that they simply defy classification. Consequently, it may be assumed that every endeavour undertaken to systematise translation studies would be either futile or strongly biased and based on arbitrary decisions. A brief glance[1] at the chronology of the main developments in the contemporary theory of translation (i.e. developed in the second half of the 20th century) presented below will only confirm this statement.

The early stages of translation studies experienced a proliferation of models that would reflect the parallel developments in linguistics and communication theory. Hence, it was possible to encounter a purely linguistic paradigm entrenched in the early ideas of information theory (i.e. decoding and encoding in Jakobson's definition of translation or the early works by the Leipzig School of the so-called *Translationslinguistik*), transformational-generative grammar (represented by Nida or Barkhudarov) or functional grammar as developed by Firth and Halliday (reflected in Catford's theory). Next, there was a strong tendency towards comparative linguistics, with a number of theories focusing on the idea of equivalence or translation procedures (a good illustration may be the theories put forward by Nida or Vinay and Darbelnet). Even though the beginnings of translation studies were influenced by linguistics to a great degree, some scholars went a step further and included the idea of untranslatability, thus moving towards more culture-oriented paradigms (e.g. Wojtasiewicz or Mounin).

1| It is outside the scope of this paper to analyse the history of translation studies with all its paradigms in detail, especially as there are numerous sources dedicated to that matter. The rough outline presented in the paper is used only as a starting point for further discussion and is meant to present the most powerful paradigms in the discipline from an apparently biased Eurocentric perspective. For more detailed analyses the reader is recommended to resort to other sources, e.g. Snell-Hornby (2006) or Munday (2012).

At the same time, in France there was a fresh approach developed by the so-called Paris School with Danica Seleskovitch as the leading scholar. This interpretive approach was fairly different from linguistic approaches basically in two ways: firstly, it was a result of studies conducted mainly on the subject of interpreting rather than translating; and secondly, it resembled (or heralded) later psycholinguistic or cognitive approaches, since it highlighted the importance of non-verbal sense and common cognitive input. The theory was worked on by other scholars who applied it to written translation and hence, shifted it in the direction of discourse analysis.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a very strong paradigm shift towards function-oriented models and non-linear models organised around a nexus or system. The first tendency was represented mainly by Germany-based scholars, who defined translation as an intercultural act of communication or a secondary offer of information, where the idea of adequacy seems to have dethroned equivalence (e.g. works by Hönig and Kussmaul or Reiss and Vermeer), or elsewhere, concentrated mainly on agents and their active role in the process of translation (the most well-known example would be the theory of translatorial action put forward by Holz-Mänttäri) or text typologies (e.g. Reiss and later on, Nord).

The second tendency may be associated mainly with the theories advanced by Israeli scholars, among them Itamar Even-Zohar or Gideon Toury, who developed a new descriptive and systemic approach, analysing literary translation as opposed to functionalists concentrating on non-fiction, pragmatic texts. Within this approach one can observe yet another paradigm mentioned by Hermans (2011) in his classification, namely the norm-oriented model, in which norms are understood as constraining factors bearing an idea of compliance (a good example is the theory developed by Toury and later on, in the nineteen nineties, the idea of norms presented by Chesterman).

The linguistics-oriented trend was continued in the seventies and onwards. However, there was a visible paradigm shift in underlying theories, with a trend to found them on discourse analysis (e.g. Hatim and Mason or Baker), which can be seen as a bridge between the earlier text-oriented approaches and later paradigms heading towards sociolinguistics, ideology or power relations.

In the meantime, theoreticians from various backgrounds attempted to address the nature of translation from a philosophical point of view; their findings followed either thoughts of other philosophers (mainly German ones) or original theories (a good illustration being the hermeneutic motion by Steiner). Paradigms developed within this approach may be insightful and inspiring; however, it was not obvious whether they could explain the general essence of translation in a clear and straightforward manner.

In the nineteen eighties there was a new empirical turn, which resulted in methodologies borrowed from psychology or the ones influenced by

psycholinguistics. New research was conducted mainly in Germany (e.g. studies by Krings and Lörscher) and Finland (research by Jääskeläinen and Trikkonen-Condit) with the help of think-aloud protocols; the main idea was to examine the process of translating or interpreting as well as to identify the most problematic areas or address the question of motivation and attitude. Despite the undeniable difficulties and flaws of the methodology (for instance, the questions of ecological validity, relatively limited subject populations or the amount of data to be processed and analysed[2]), the results presented by these scholars proved to be beneficial mainly in the area of translation pedagogy.

The mind of the translator continued to intrigue scholars long afterwards into the nineties, when they resorted to cognitive paradigms. Ernst-August Gutt can be considered the leading name representing this turn; his cognitive theory of translation followed the prerequisites of Gricean maxims as well as Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory. In Poland, on the other hand, Tabakowska advocated cognitive grammar developed by Langacker, arguing that imagery is the key concept in translation. Hejwowski tried to reconcile the traditional communicative point of view with a more cognitive-oriented one by creating a cognitive-communicative theory of translation.

Simultaneously, there was a considerable room for more ideology-based models or the so-called committed approaches, which allowed voices from non-European cultures to be heard: this tendency or turn included postcolonial approaches developed mainly in India or South America (e.g. Gayatri Spivak or Brazilian cannibalism). In Europe, the main focus was shifted towards, for instance, the question of ethics, visibility of the translator (works by Lawrence Venuti), gender issues (papers by Lori Chamberlain, Sherry Simon or Keith Harvey) or ideology and power relations (questions raised by, *inter alia*, Maria Tymoczko and André Lefevere).

In the mid-nineties there was another aspect of translation that gained much prominence – on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the creation of cinema the subject of audiovisual translation was brought to the forefront, with scholars initially interested in the question pertaining to the main differences between two leading modalities, i.e. dubbing and subtitling, or the ontological status of the area of research. Currently, it seems that studies on AVT have been heading towards the problem of media accessibility or testing the long-held and accepted hypotheses (for instance the famous six-second rule by d'Ydewalle or objective audio description scripts by Snyder); to this end researchers have adopted

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2| The most serious flaws of the think-aloud methodology include the problem of the context, which may be far from the natural one, with tested persons required to report on their decision-making process, which may be very subjective and difficult to describe in objective and clear terms. This, in turn, will usually mean a vast amount of data to be analysed, which influences the size of the sample population.

research methods from other disciplines, including think-aloud methodology, eye-tracking, key-logging or encephalography.

Meanwhile, there have been also attempts at integrating the existing paradigms: the first and probably the most famous endeavour was undertaken by Snell-Hornby (1988) towards the end of the nineteen eighties, in which she suggested creating a single continuum for various areas of translation, thus trying to bridge the gap between the undeniable distinction typical of translation studies and separating literary or artistic translation from a more pragmatic and commercial one. Nevertheless, the integrated approach was believed to have serious flaws (e.g. lack of rigid boundaries between texts and translation activities or the usefulness of an all-encompassing model for translator training), which probably could have been the reason of its restricted applicability.

Currently, translation scholars seem to be absorbed with the problem of the digital age, which is changing the translation landscape to a considerable degree. Studies into localisation, CAT tools, re-speaking or post-editing have become even more visible; scholars have been asking questions about the future of the profession and the potential role of a human translator (Cronin 2013). However, at the same time one can observe a U-turn recognised by Snell-Hornby (2006) more than ten years ago. Scholars tend to use the older paradigms and question prior findings. Consequently, translation studies as a discipline is becoming even more interdisciplinary and empiric, which may have both positive and negative results – firstly, it may enrich the research and validate the findings, but on the other hand, it may question the autonomy of the discipline and its own methodology along with giving an impression that there is a relatively dangerous tendency of re-inventing the wheel.

3 Translation as an object of study

A cursory and fairly selective glance at the development of translation studies from the previous section may be sufficient to see the bewildering variety of paradigms within the discipline. It would be a challenging task to classify them into a coherent typology because of certain features, which become visible after analysing their main assumptions.

To begin with, each approach or paradigm develops its own model of analysis and/or assessment along with tools and research techniques. They address the same object of interest, i.e. translation (or interpreting), which may probably exhaust the list of the most striking similarities; the object of interest is defined in a slightly or considerably different manner, which, as a matter of course, shifts the focus of attention. Consequently, every paradigm may be said to have been developed in order to address a certain and specific aspect of translation, which leads to another conclusion, i.e. the main object of study is treated in a rather fragmentary fashion.

Linguistic models will address the problem of languages and the idea of structural differences, whereas, for instance, committed approaches will concentrate on the problem of manipulation due to political or ideological matters. Some theories will be centred on translating literary works, which seems nowhere near the findings stemming from research on translating legal texts or audiovisual products.

In addition to that, various research paradigms will be based on their own research methods and terminological apparatuses. In a majority of cases, research methods seem to have been borrowed from other disciplines, which resulted in the coinage of various terms addressing translation studies as a "multidiscipline" or "interdiscipline" (e.g. Snell-Hornby 2006) with no clear disciplinary boundaries. This phenomenon is fairly positive, since it helps to validate and refine the outcome, test the hypothesis or develop more holistic approaches. However, the second tendency, i.e. defining accepted terms anew, is rather negative, since it leads to an even greater degree of fragmentation or the emergence of new fuzzy and empty buzzwords as well as terminological chaos, which in the end results in a lack of unambiguous and generally accepted definitions of key concepts.

What is more, there are no strict boundaries between various approaches and paradigms, which makes the classification and the understanding of the nature of translation even more challenging. It is possible to trace common threads that run through particular turns in translation studies or to see cases of scholars who adopt elements of various paradigms without any strict methodological rigour. It signals the fact that translation is a complicated activity and demands a multifaceted analysis; it also indicates that it is almost impossible to concentrate on a single framework, unless we want to develop a partial theory of pure translation studies. Moreover, there are no strict chronological boundaries, with scholars coming back to older paradigms or questioning their own previous findings.

It all points to one obvious and inevitable conclusion; in order to understand the gist of translation we have to resort to various models, analyse them in a selective way, choose some of the most significant aspects or features of the researched object and… create an integrated view that would fit our demands. It means having quite an extensive knowledge and an ease to observe associations between abstract theories and real-life situations. It may not be problematic to a person with a certain amount of professional experience and/or sound theoretical background or a highly specialised field of interest.

However, it may prove to be particularly difficult for translation trainees who may not know which dimension of translation practice they will be dealing with on a regular basis. This problem is becoming even more acute today when we have to face a fast-paced development of technologies, which does not leave the world of translation unaffected. It seems to be widely accepted that it may not be feasible to equip a translator-to-be with all the necessary skills or know-how necessary

to be able to perform a variety of potential tasks. The main idea of translation training programmes is to develop necessary professional competences, which is another idea difficult to define precisely; even though there are numerous sources addressing the problem of translation competence, there is still no consensus on its nature, which leaves us with the notion of "macrocompetences" and "sub-competences" (Kelly 2005). Undoubtedly, one of these sub-competences will be the proper understanding of the nature of translation, which should be gained throughout theoretical introduction and practice.

4 Translation and its key concepts: A semiotic perspective

Having analysed the relatively short, yet extremely rich history of translation studies, we may now attempt to indicate and list the most significant concepts that are connected with its object of study, i.e. translation.

Translation is founded on the traditional dichotomy of source versus target, which also determines its natural directionality. Furthermore, translation has at least three dimensions that will cover various aspects of the activity. Firstly, the key dimension is the human agent included in the process. Another dimension will address the linguistic aspect of translation, which is rooted in natural languages (unless we concentrate on pure intersemiotic translation examined by most translation semioticians). Finally, there is a more global perspective, which will be referred to as the semiotic (or extralinguistic) dimension of translation.

Analysing each dimension in more detail and in a top-down fashion, we will arrive at a set of concepts included within this framework. Despite the rapid development of translation-related technology and its undeniable impact on translation, it may be assumed that translating is a human-centred activity. In other words, the process of translation involves a human factor, which means that it is shaped by a number of persons, which is clear and visible in nexus models; both sides of the process, i.e. the source and the target side will involve "agents", such as the commissioner, initiator or other persons directly connected with the LSP industry, as well as the ST author, TT reader, proof-reader or censor, to name just a few (cf. Holz-Mänttäri 1984). In the middle of the whole process, we will find a language specialist who will try to reconcile interests of other agents. The language specialist is a person with the necessary expertise and competences who is frequently responsible for various tasks, including preparing a translation, post-editing a machine-generated text or catering for accessibility.

The linguistic dimension will determine other elements, including the source and the target texts as well as all intermediary texts, the code and the message to be conveyed. It will pertain to problems stemming from purely structural differences between natural languages, problems of intertextuality or culture-bound items. In other words, it will address all issues related to the presence of verbal

signs, their denotative and connotative meanings, functions and syntagmatic relations (which by itself suggests a logical Morrissian semiotic order of semantics, pragmatics and syntax). True and simple as it may be, translation goes far beyond the dimension of a natural language and verbal signs. A good illustration may be a case of singable translations, where the idea of one-to-one correspondence falls victim to the problem of singability and rhythm, or comic translations, where the image-word relation seems to be the key element in the whole process. It seems then justified to embrace the third, more global dimension of translation, i.e. its semiotic framework.

The semiotic dimension of translation will include extra-linguistic or extra-verbal elements that may not necessarily fall within the scope of traditional language studies; translation is an example of communication between representatives of two (or more)[3] cultures, which as pointed out by Lotman (1981, Łotman 2008) or Eco (1984), are systems of communication *per se*, functioning as complex sign systems organised in semiotic codes and conveying meaning. A natural element of a given culture will be, for instance, its sense of conventions, language acceptability norms or censorship regulations, all of which may act as a filter in the process of translation.

Semiotics will be also visible in other significant aspects of translation; in order to include all non-verbal signs, which have become a tangible element of today's communication, it may be advisable to redefine the concept of a text and include the concepts of a medium of communication and code (instead of the traditional linguistics-oriented idea of the language, meaning a natural language in most cases). It seems that this semiotic perspective would help to overcome at least some of the most problematic ontological problems.

A semiotic perspective would enable us to define a text as a clearly structured composition carrying meaning by employing certain elements of a given semiotic code (i.e. a language from a semiotic point of view); as a result, a text will mean all different elements that work together towards creating the meaning, including verbal and non-verbal signs. Thus, it will be possible to talk about texts in a form of, for example, a legal document with its intermediary texts necessary in the process of its interpretation, an audiovisual text meaning a film, a theatre performance or a 360-degree media product or a multimedia text exemplified by a video game. The medium of communication will be seen as yet another element

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3| There are of course cases when translation takes place within one culture, which seems the natural context of interlingual translation and a great many cases of intersemiotic translation. However, it seems that mediating the meaning between disparate cultures is the core of translation, which may be visible in the etymological origin of the word: the meaning of the word "transferre" highlights the idea of carrying across. The main significant assumption in the article is the fact that translation takes place within a culture-based environment.

influencing the translation process, since the mode of delivery or the change of the medium have both become central elements of a great many translation practices.

Moreover, a semiotic perspective means that translation is a process of constant sign interpretation revolving around the traditional Peircean triadic definition of semiosis with a clear beginning and an end. The idea of semiotranslation or translation semiosis, advocated by, e.g. Torop (2000), Stecconi (2004), Gorlée (1994, 2004) or Petrilli (2003, 2007), encompasses the whole translation context – both in its micro- and in its macrosense. The microcontext will pertain to the translator and his/her decision-making processes, motivation, as well as time or financial aspects. The macrocontext, on the other hand, will include all other elements of the translation semiosis and will indicate potential sources of impediments, since it addresses all three dimensions of the translation process (Rędzioch-Korkuz 2018).

The logical principles of Peircean semiotics may also be applied to another significant concept of translation which has been both appraised and criticised, i.e. the idea of equivalence. Translation studies may offer a number of definitions of equivalence and its features, ranging from a linguistic concept of decoding to a descriptive category inherent in every case of translation. By referring to the Peircean division of signs into icons, indices and symbols, we can approach equivalence from a threefold perspective: hence, equivalence may be divided into three dimensions – iconic, indexical and symbolic. Following the traditional relations between the signifier and the signified, we may assume that iconic resemblance will be connected with the degree of similarity between the source and target text (similar to the idea of, for instance, interpretive resemblance postulated by Gutt 2000) and will pertain mainly to the connotative meaning of the source text; indexical equivalence will assume the direct relationship between the translation and its original (which may help to exclude cases of relay translation, self-translation or pseudotranslation as non-standard varieties) and will pertain to the degree of difference between both and objective categories of denotation; and finally, symbolic equivalence will mean norms and conventions in both languages/cultures as well as potential implications arising from them (Rędzioch-Korkuz forthcoming, cf. Pieczyńska-Sulik 2009). This perspective will address at least three fundamental concepts of translation, i.e. the concept of equivalence defined as a super-meme by Chesterman (1997)[4], translation loss (analysed in terms of differences between both texts) and translation norms.

4| Generally, the concept of equivalence presupposes a certain degree of correspondence between the source and target text as regards their textual make-up, as well as their denotative and connotative functions. Ideally, equivalence calls for almost one-to-one correspondence between the ST and TT. However, as suggested by Chesterman (1997) it has

The triadic concept of the sign put forward by Peirce may also be applied to translation: for instance, as suggested by Stecconi (2004), a dynamic model of translation will involve the source text functioning as the object, the target text being the sign and the signification of the translated text as the interpreter. In this fashion, if we follow Peirce's theory further, we may say that this triadic relation leads to the object determining the sign, which in turn will have an impact on the interpretant. What is communicated is a specific shape or pattern, as argued by Peirce "That which is communicated from the Object through the Sign to the Interpretant is a Form; that is to say, it is nothing like an existent, but is a power, is the fact that something would happen under certain conditions" (MS 793: 1–3).

This final comment should be considered absolutely vital in terms of translation, demonstrating its dynamic and imprecise nature; in other words, it seems that there is not one strict definition of translation, since both the product and process assume a slightly different shape under different circumstances. Therefore, a semiotic perspective may be one of the most applicable to various instances of translation. The logical categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness[5] have been reflected in a great many aspects of this activity, which only proves the potential of semiotics for translation studies.

5 Conclusions

Tarasti argued that resorting to and relying on classics may not always be the best methodological choice, highlighting that even though "There are, naturally, schools that persist in believing that things are this or that because Peirce or Greimas said so, and not because things *are* so", semiotics "has to be renewed if it wants to preserve its position on the vanguard of thought" (2000: 4).

However, it seems that theoretical foundations authored by the first generation of prominent semioticians based on logic and/or structuralism along with some of the most significant tenets of linguistics offer a comprehensive and simple explanatory model of translation, and further on, serve as an example supporting their theoretical or practical application. A wider perspective allows us to

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become a super-meme of translation studies and with this degree of faithfulness being difficult to achieve, equivalence may be seen as a conceptual or descriptive tool.

5| Peirce developed a system of three fundamental categories, i.e. Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. Firstness means a condition of unmediated being with no connection to any other objects and will usually signify similarity. Secondness, one the other hand, is a condition of mediated but non-reflexive access, which means a dyadic relation in general. Finally, Thirdness, understood as both mediated and reflexive access, means that something exists and creates a co-relation between the other two elements and thus can be compared to mediation.

include both verbal and non-verbal elements into the process of translation: the significance of the latter should by no means be trivialised. In this way it becomes possible to see a wider context of translation, which goes far beyond learnable tricks of the trade or advanced tools.

Moreover, in the light of the fact that more and more research on translation is carried out with the help of methods borrowed directly from other disciplines, which often means departing relatively far from the humanities-based nature of translation and heading towards numbers, statistics, EEG data, heat maps or gaze plots, it seems that semiotics, which is closely related to linguistics, is a natural and optimal, yet overlooked, solution. By indicating key concepts and providing clear descriptive categories, semiotics helps to understand and explain the very nature of translation, which is hidden across different paradigms developed by translation scholars.

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