

## A Conceptual Analysis of the terms “Translation” and “Translation Studies”: definition and specific traits

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### ABSTRACT

The present article aims to explore the concept of the translation phenomenon both as a process and as the outcome of this process by demonstrating its multiple dimensions. We attempt to define the translation phenomenon, by taking into consideration its conceptualization in different civilizations. The general characteristics and the different translation categories are also studied by focusing on the types of interlingual translation. Furthermore, the article explores the scientific features, the goals and the structure of the science of translation as well as the evolution of translation thought. Afterwards, the epistemological features, the evolution and the goals of the science are described. The main conclusion drawn is that the scientific approach of the translation phenomenon cannot be nondimensional since it demands various different reflections by adopting principles, concepts and methods from other scientific domains. Contemporary Translatology teaches us that translation does not make up a simple linguistic procedure and the theoretical thought regarding translation is not limited to the text or to what is expressed through the text.

**KEYWORDS:** translation phenomenon, translation studies, translation as rewriting, the multidimensional nature of translation

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### INTRODUCTION

#### **What is translation: an attempt to define the translation phenomenon**

A comprehensive definition of the concept of translation is considered to be important in order to fully understand and interpret the translation phenomenon. However, despite the fact that it is a phenomenon closely related to human progress, a clear definition of translation has always been problematic. This is due to the fact that translation is a highly complex process and also the term translation does not refer to a single type or kind of interlingual communication.

The term “translation” presents a complicated and unclear use given that, depending on the language environment we meet it, it may denote the following: the process of transposition from one language into another, the result of this process, that is, a specific language entity, and, finally, an abstract concept that includes both the process and the final product of this process.

Toury (1999) distinguishes between the translation act and the translation event. The translation act, that we also call translation process makes up an intellectual and cognitive activity that entails the decisions a translator takes, whereas, the translation event regards the socio-cultural environment that affects the translation act. It goes without saying that a translation event cannot be done without the accomplishment of the translation act.

Translation does not make up a mechanical and typological transfer of words in a simple manner, since the meaning of a text is not limited to the addition of a whole set of words that compose it (Jakobson, 1963). According to Guillemin-Flescher (1986), “translate” does not mean neither replacing words nor syntactic structures with other syntactic structures. Furthermore, according to Culioli (1973), despite the existing differences among living languages that are obvious during the translation process, they all embrace “the grammatical generalization” (and the translation), a fact that proves the existence of holistic schemes and procedures. In reality, this is about an intellectual activity, the realization of which is based on spiritual and intuitional procedures, such as comprehension, critical ability and constant decision taking.

### **TRANSLATION AS AN ACT OF REWRITING**

It is essential to abandon the absolute approaches that dominate the western world and adopt a spherical approach of the basic principles of the translation process, that will be based on the concept of a verbal activity. Within this framework, translation makes up a fact that bears a specific purpose that is closely connected to the communicative and cultural parameters of discourse (Grammenidis & Nenopoulou, 2007). Thus, we could claim that translation makes up an act of “rewriting”, a concept that entails the notions of interpretation, creativity and reproduction of a text, under new language circumstances and conditions. In Greek language the term “translation”, means, according to Maroniti (2008), “show the way”, “explain”, “advise”, “suggest”, “reflect”, “realise”, “imagine”, “observe”, denoting the result of the verbal activity and not to the activity itself. Nenopoulou (2007, p. 199) claims that the etymology of the term translation in Greek denotes that it is “a postlingual activity” with which paraphrase relations are created.

By considering translation as an act of rewriting leads us to handle translation as a rewriting activity into another language and under other communicative circumstances of the stylistic and cultural content of a text. It makes up an activity that compares different languages and different civilizations by comparing different norms, both linguistic and non-linguistic norms. Regardless of the type of text to be translated or the pair of languages involved in the translation process, translation entails complimentary activities such as the process of comprehension and the process of rewriting (Garnier, 1985).

The above process focuses on some basic parameters of the translation phenomenon such as the recipient-user of translation and his hermeneutical skills, the function of the text to be translated, the communicative goals both of the commissioner and the writer of the original. Translation is not considered to be the “mirror of the original”, but it has to meet the users’ expectations and needs regarding content and form. Thus, the quality of a translation is defined in accordance with the effectiveness of communication, and not with the criterion of fidelity to the language norms of the original.

According to Gouadec (2002/2007, p. 22), a translation must be real so that its content can correspond to the reality described in the source-text and not bear errors, a factor that may oblige translators to adopt the content and expressive means of the text to the hermeneutical skills of the target audience and, finally, it must be in accordance to the language and cultural norms of the audience to which it addresses.

### **CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF TRANSLATION**

The term “translation” refers mostly to the phenomenon of transforming an original text that has been constructed in a natural language into a text in another natural language. There are also other categories of translation, that the American linguist Jakobson describes in his article “Aspects Linguistiques de la traduction” (1959/1963). According to his approach, there are three different categories of translation: the intralingual translation, the interlingual translation and the intersemiotic translation. The intralingual translation involves interpreting language signs through other signs of the same language. Examples of intralingual translation are the translation from ancient to modern Greek, the paraphrase and the case of searching synonyms within the same language. Interlingual translation involves interpreting language signs of language A through signs of another language B. Intersemiotic translation involves interpreting language signs through symbols of non-verbal signal systems.

### **TYPES OF INTERLINGUAL TRANSLATION**

Nowadays interlingual translation takes four different forms: written translation, oral translation of a written text, simultaneous interpretation and consecutive translation. These types of translation can be characterized in various levels: at a first level, we distinguish between two wide categories: translations of general interest (general translation) and specialised translations.

The first category regards texts of general interest, that is, texts that address to a wide readership and do not entail a level of technicity or specialization (biographies, cooking recipes, leaflets, tourist guides, manuals, newspaper articles). The second category involves texts that address to experts, regards a specialised subject field, presents itself with specific format, demands specific processes or tools, protocols or techniques.

According to Gouadec (2002/2007), the various categories of specialised translation can be defined according to the type and subject of the text to be translated, and, thus, we can talk about literary translation (novel, poetry, short story), theatrical translation, technical translation, medical translation, financial translation, legal translation (that is related to material of legal nature) and, generally, translations that regard various scientific fields and activities.

Finally, we can categorize translations based on the criterion of the environment to which they address and the function they aim to perform and talk about judiciary translation, medical translation (that addresses to doctors), trade translation (that address to various sectors of trade services).

### **THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRANSLATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVILIZATIONS**

Since ancient times translation has been one of the basic means of intercultural communication and coexistence among different populations. It is classified among the activities that are almost as old as the history of the human spirit. It is indisputable fact that translation makes up an instructional, educational, social, political and cultural event. The act of translating is among the necessary

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human activities, that helps people to understand the thought and discourse of other people in the fields of literature, philosophy, science and, thus, it is considered to be a major power in the development of a universal civilization by feeding a society with new ideas.

Given that values, principles and the ideas of the ancient Greek civilization were transferred in western countries through numerous translations within centuries, it would not be exaggeration to claim that translation makes up the basic component of the western civilization. Meschonnic (1973/1999: 32-34) mentions that Europe has been the only continent where the formation of its civilization was based on translations (from Greek in the field of philosophy and from Jewish in the field of religion), a fact that it is usually hidden since translations are used as if they are the original text. Nowadays the European Union uses translation as an activity that ensures the autonomy of national identities within united Europe by respecting the wealth and its cultural and language variation and by targeting at the development and protection of the European cultural heritage.

Translation makes up a necessary prerequisite for the survival of languages by respecting the language and cultural differentiation. Translation is a necessary component in all fields of social life such as sciences, technology, economy and it is also present in our everyday life. It should be stressed that technological advances result in bringing us into contact with a variety of different languages which has as a consequence the development of new translation types. Since the number of speaking languages is too big, it is estimated to be over 6000 languages, it makes it utopic to think that one can be able to speak all these languages.

However, despite the significance of the translation phenomenon, for many centuries there has been a lack of its generalised and methodic consideration and this is exactly the reason for which the science of Translation Studies had been late in being established as an autonomous discipline. Just like people talked long before the appearance of the science of linguistics, they also used to translate long before translation made up a subject of scientific study. The systematic approach of the translation phenomenon is relatively recent, since the science of Translation Studies is a newly-established science that started to develop in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For many centuries, translation was considered to be an “art” that does not undergo any scientific approach or analysis. However, the scientific approach of the translation act is necessary, since it allows, among others, the systematization of the translation process and the showing of the multidimensional feature of the translation phenomenon. It also contributes to translators acquiring the necessary skills so that they can resolve practical problems by providing them with the required theoretical and conceptual tools as well as with the necessary language competences that will allow them to defend and justify the decisions that they take. It can also be used as a point of reference for the evaluation of the translation products. Generally, the scientific approach of the translation act can offer to translators the whole set of knowledge that will help them to be expressed with systematization when they are asked to evaluate matters related to the translation process such as the language choices, they have available for the translation of a certain text and the ideological consequences of their work.

### **THE TERM “TRANSLATION STUDIES”**

We call “Translation Studies” the science that studies the translation phenomenon. It is a science that targets at the thought, the observation and problematization and not a science of knowledge. This is about a science field that belongs to the humanistic studies and has as its object the systematic study, description and application of all parametres, verbal and non-verbal of the translation practice (the text to be translated, the translation commission, the translated text, the translator, the translation process).

The goal is to explain, through systematic research, the translation act and the development of theoretical models, as well. It refers to the study of both oral and written translations and it covers the whole range of research and pedagogic activity regarding translation and translators, the evaluation of translations and the development of practical applications. Just as most scientific fields it is about a theoretical approach that derives from practice. The terms that have been proposed from time to time for the definition of this scientific domain vary (mostly at the English-speaking bibliography). Some experts proposed the term “translatology”, some others the term “science of translation” (Nida, 1964). Nowadays, the term “Translation Studies” has dominated that was proposed by the American theoretician James Holmes (1972).

### **THE ORIGINS OF TRANSLATION STUDIES**

Undoubtedly, the theoretical approach of the translation phenomenon derives from the translator’s need to justify his decisions. Translators feel the need to comment and justify their translations since it took a long time in order to be made understood that the “differentiation” and the “deviation” between the original and the translation make up important components of translation. Finally, when we refer to the act of translating, we come up with the old philosophical problem of “Sameness” and the “Other”.

The discipline of Translation Studies presents nowadays a systematic and methodological organization of the issues that occupy central position in its reflection. During the last decades there has been a significant increase of theory manuals that concern translation and also there has been an impressive thematic variety of the scientific studies that are published. The number of translation assignments published has been so large that someone could assume that the theoretical thought around this topic is a recent event. However, the theoretical and didactic discourse regarding the translation phenomenon started 4000 years ago. For many centuries, there has been a lack of a generalized consideration of the translation phenomenon and this is exactly the reason

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why Translation Studies was late in establishing itself as an autonomous scientific field. Until the second world war, the empirical thought dominates and the thoughts around translation derive from the translators' observations regarding specific problems they meet in the process of translating a text. The translator himself analyses, comments, makes assumptions and comes to conclusions that are based on a specific text.

The systematic approach of the translation phenomenon is relatively recent. The reasons for the increasing interest in translation (Eco, 2003, p. 23) could be summarised as follows: the phenomenon of internationalization that brings into close contact different groups of people who speak different languages and the development of information technology that encourages people to attempt to improve the systems of artificial intelligence.

### **THE SCIENTIFIC FEATURES OF TRANSLATION STUDIES**

Translation Studies is actually an empirical and descriptive science that attempts to define through observation the principles and the repeated phenomena during the translation process. There is also an interconnection between the theory and practice and also a very strong sociological dimension. (Gile, 2005, p. 243).

The main features of the science can be summarised as follows (Munday 2001/2002): Translation Studies is interdisciplinary since it aims to study the translation phenomenon in its whole width. It is the meeting point of many sciences and research methods.

As an interdisciplinary field it borrows many components from other disciplines that offer concepts which are necessary for the analysis or reappraisal of the translation phenomenon. Translation Studies has received strong influence from disciplines such as linguistics, the theory of literature, semiotics, cognitive psychology, stylistics, cultural studies, mathematics e.t.c.

Contrary to the linguists, psychologists, biologists, physicians or historians, Translatologists do not belong to a specific university department that bears the name of the science that they serve. The level of quality of translation thought varies because of the fact that all Translatologists do not have the same basic education: some of them have studies in linguistics or literature while others have professional experience in translation but they do not possess any experience in scientific research.

### **CONCLUSION**

Translation has been an activity that coexists with human history since it aims at serving human communication. The increasing mobility of people from country to country or from continent to continent, the need of finding new markets for the promotion of new products, and the easy access to information and knowledge that is offered by the new digital environment make up the basic reasons for the widespread use of translation and the structure of new species of interlingual translation. These needs lead to a redefinition of the translation process itself and its understanding not as a simple procedure of transferring linguistic signs, but as act of rewriting of the meaning of the original text in the framework of a new communication circumstance. The scientific discipline that studies the translation phenomenon in its various dimensions is called “Translation Studies”. It is a relatively new scientific field that has been recently developed and it bears an interdisciplinary nature. For many centuries, translation was considered to be an "art" that does not accept any scientific approach or analysis. However, nowadays the scientific approach of the translation act is considered to be necessary since it allows us to systematize the translation process and to realise the multidimensional character of the translation phenomenon.

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