

Linguistic Approach to Translation Theory and Didactics

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Chapter 1: Aims, Objectives and Work Hypotheses

The present work was completed within the framework of a research programme of the Ionian University and was initiated by the following questions:

A: which set of criteria should be employed in order to determine whether a text is "easy" or "difficult" to translate;

B: which set of criteria should be employed in order to evaluate the translation

act, i.e. the final result produced by the translation effort of students in the translation department of a university.

In our attempt to research into the above questions, we examined 150 translations of scientific, political and journalistic texts, translated from German into Greek by students of German Literature in the University of Athens.

We introduce the term "displacement" which we use as a methodological tool; it is intended to describe the phenomenon where an element of the source language (SL) ext shifts during the translation process from its initial position to another position η an abstract scale which is common both to the SL and the target language (TL) systems and appears as such in the TL text.

Displacements occur on the semantic, syntactic, morphological, lexical, stylistic and pragmatic level. They are considered indicators of translation

difficulties, are interpreted on the basis of comparative linguistic study (of the two languages) and, depending on their impact on the comprehension of the TL text, degrees of significance - ranging from negligible to particularly important - are assigned to them. Displacements are either optional or imperative, since not all languages comprehend, organise and interpret the real world in the same way.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background

During the first period of theoretical thought on translation, a clearly empirical viewpoint was adopted, whereby each particular text was considered as the starting and the final point of any theoretical approach.

From Cicero to Luther, one can observe the problems and the transition from literal, word-to-word, to free, sense to sense, translation.

The second period is characterised by an interpretative approach of the translation practice and is not confined to specific texts any more. The term "naturalisation" as opposed to the term "foreignisation" is studied by Schleiermacher, Ortega and W. Benjamin.

W.v. Humboldt, on the other hand, places translation within a linguistic philosophical framework, and believes that the inner form of each language is a linguistic reflection of extralinguistic reality. Therefore, languages also differ with respect to the way they view the world, while this view is in turn expressed through language

Sapir and Whorf further Humboldt's theory and examine the relation between language and civilisation more thoroughly.

Chomsky
with his Generative Transformational Grammar revisits the initial problem of untranslatability and employs the terms "surface structures", "deep structures"¹¹ and "language universals" in order to re-examine the issue of translatability, through a different route, as a problem central to human speech.

The latest period of Translation Theory is observed in the 1960s and is based on findings of General and Applied Linguistics. In this context, R. Jakobson understands translation as a receding interpretation. G. Mounin stresses, from the structuralist viewpoint, the importance of situation. J.C. Catford uses the semantic theory of R. Firth and M.A.K. Halliday to support his views and underlines the notion of translation equivalence by rejecting the

notion of "transfer" of meanings from one language to another. Finally, E. Nida and C. Taber distinguish between formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence by constructively using Sociolinguistics and Communication Theory in order to interpret the phenomenon of translation.

Seen from the perspective of Comparative Stylistics, the work of P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet in Translation Theory is based on the findings of F. de Saussure and Ch. Bally; they introduce the notion of 'translation unit'. The translation act is successfully completed by using seven techniques (precedes techniques).

The semantic approach of A. Ljudskanov revisits the issue of translatability, based on the principle of information invariance.

The linguistic approach gave rise to various reactions among the empirical translators. E. Cary was one of the first to oppose this approach; he uses literary translation as an example which cannot be mapped by any linguistic model. H. Meschonnic, H. Lederer and many others support the view that linguistic analyses are generally of no particular significance to translation. In our opinion, this view is a pseudo-problem: Linguistics is not limited to the area of speech (langage), it is also the science of "parole", translation being an integral part of it. J.R. Ladmiraal and P. Newmark attempt to ease this contrast and support a theory which is based on the classification of texts into categories.

On the basis of the above, but also supported by the detailed analysis of the translation models and the efforts to interpret the translation process as presented by Wilss, Vermeer, Taiton, Delisle, Holmes, Gamier, Pergnier, Levy, Bonnerot, Seleskovitch and Lederer, we believe Translation Theory is a scientific field involving a number of other sciences, since it tries to define its objective and methods within a multi-level framework, that of Philosophy, Comparative Grammatology, Comparative Stylistics, Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Ethnolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Communication Theory, as well as of Computational Linguistics and Information Science. We shall focus our attention on the area of Comparative Linguistics and Stylistics as well as on that of Communication Theory.

Chapter 3: Methodology

On the basis of the above theoretical considerations, the following terms are employed in the present work as tools:

- *translation performance*: it is the translation of a communication unit, i.e. of a linguistic act;
- *translation unit*: on a theoretical level, it is identical to the semantic unit and, on a methodological level, it enables us to introduce the term "valency" of the translation unit. This term is intended to describe the typical elements which constitute the meaning of each unit and are therefore used as a criterion to determine its length;
- *equivalence, correspondence, displacement*: authoritative approaches make reference to the ideal relationships between the original and the translated text. The descriptive approach seeks to describe phenomena of this kind in cases where the translated text does not meet the conditions of an ideal relationship with the original. Each differentiation with respect to the original text, without initially being positively or negatively charged, is called displacement. Displacements occur on every linguistic level, they may have a positive, a negative or a neutral impact on the communicative aim of the TL text and are caused by different factors (e.g. linguistic interference). Fifty students in the Department of German Studies of the University of Athens, who had chosen the subject of translation as their area of speciality, were given three German texts to be translated into Greek: the first was scientific, the second journalistic and the third political. These translations were classified in translation entities and were analysed on a morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, stylistic and pragmatic level.

On the basis of the conclusions drawn in this way, we produce a descriptive translation model which allows us to evaluate the translation act and leads to approaches regarding methodology and didactics:

Chapters 4-8: Linguistic Analysis

The five linguistic levels under examination are covered in these chapters: Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Stylistics and Pragmatics. The linguistic bases of each of the above levels are described in detail from the viewpoint of a communicative approach and are clearly TL-oriented. This combination of linguistic and translation conclusions is supported by numerous examples and leads to the schematic representation of the translation process for each of the above levels, where transition from the original to the translation must be completed systematically, gradually and by carefully examining each detail.

Chapter 9: Results and Conclusions

The empirical conclusions which are based on the detailed linguistic approach to the translation process, as referred to in chapters 4-8, lead to the following model: From a methodological point of view, the translation process is divided into five stages for each level:

- a. First, the translator must comprehend each translation unit within the framework of the SL text's micro- and macrostructure, and its overall communicative aim;
- b. the assumptions arising from the above process must also be identified in the communicative aim of the TL text. This leads to a reconstruction of the experience included in the translation unit;
- c. a relationship is established between the assumptions formed after the analysis of the SL translation unit and those formed after the reconstruction which takes place in the TL text, in order to examine where these two sets of assumptions coincide and where they do not;
- d. the translator now enters into the translation act itself and linguistically renders the result of his/her mental processes. If the TL language system allows meanings and/or textual structures to be maintained and the translator chooses to do so, the quality of the translation is functionally acceptable. In such cases a possible displacement causes unnecessary differentiation and, therefore, alters the reference of the SL text. If, on the other hand, the TL language system imposes a displacement and the translator ignores it, the translation fails;
- e. at this point the personal ability and the range of the translator's linguistic selections can be utilised; it can be checked whether the selections made up to that stage with respect to the TL are in line with the type of text to be translated.

Apart from describing the translation process, this model contributes to the following:

- i. The determination of the degree of translation difficulty for each original text. Since each displacement imposed by the language system requires that the translator be creatively liberated from the original text, each translation unit has to be examined in conjunction with the possibly requisite displacements on the five levels (Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Stylistics and Pragmatics). The total number of the requisite displacements

on each level indicates the degree of translation difficulty on the specific level and, therefore, the difficulty of the whole text.

- ii. The evaluation of the translation act. The access of each stage of the present model, in each translation unit and linguistic level, is marked by using a rate of translation difficulty (this rate is 1 if access is successful); it is then multiplied by the degree of translation difficulty of the corresponding translation unit. In this way, evaluation covers not only the success of the translation, but also its adaptation to the specific requirements of the SL text.

In this way, from the viewpoint of Translation Methodology and Didactics, it is possible to determine the degree of translation difficulty of each language level; this allows the teacher to select texts showing a gradual increase of this degree for each specific level.

Finally, the following eight points summarise the relationships between the communicative function of the language and the text to be translated:

- a. Each text is intended to achieve a communicative aim;
- b. This communicative aim governs the writer's selections regarding the semantic level and the length of the lexical units in the texts, as well as the text's morphological and syntactic micro- and macrostructure;
- c. The correct method of expressing the above communicative aim depends each time on the particular communication situation, i.e. on the pragmatic components of the communication process;
- d. Finally, the above elements determine and at the same time constitute the stylistic selections observed in the text;
- e. The communicative aim is both the starting and the final point for the levels of Semantics, Lexis, Morphology, Syntax, Pragmatics and Stylistics:

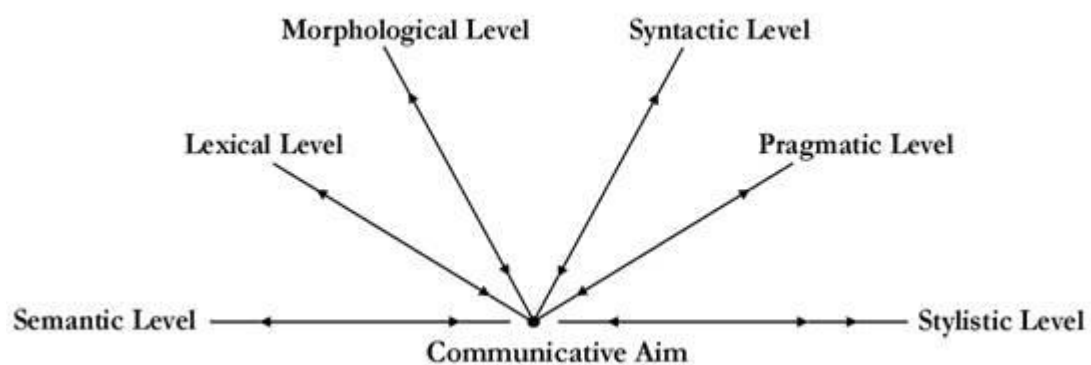


Figure 1

f. Since, however, these levels do not appear separately, are interrelated and overlap, they can be schematically represented:

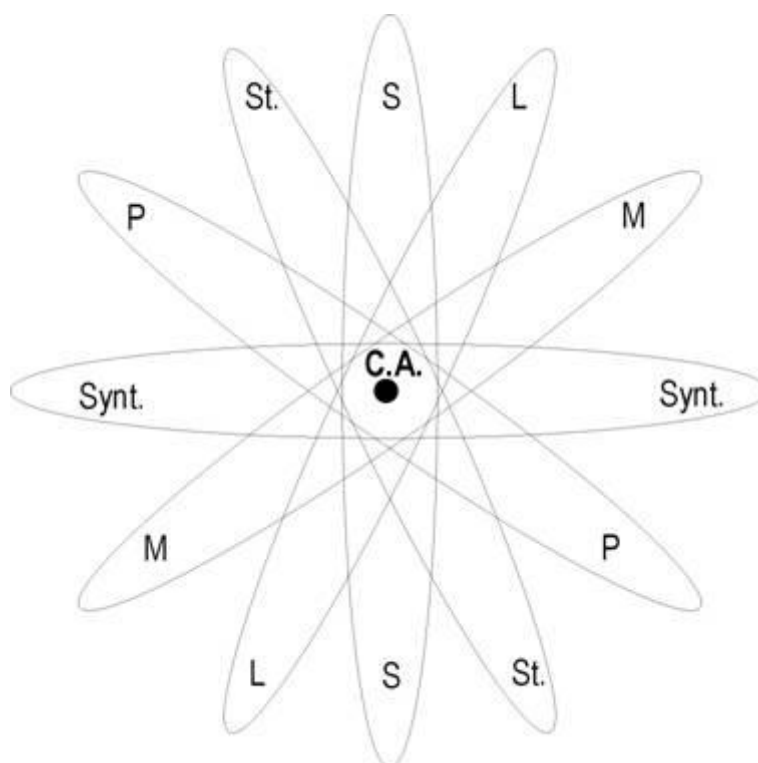


Figure 2

g. The transfer from the original to the translation is effected through the translation process mentioned above:

The translation process

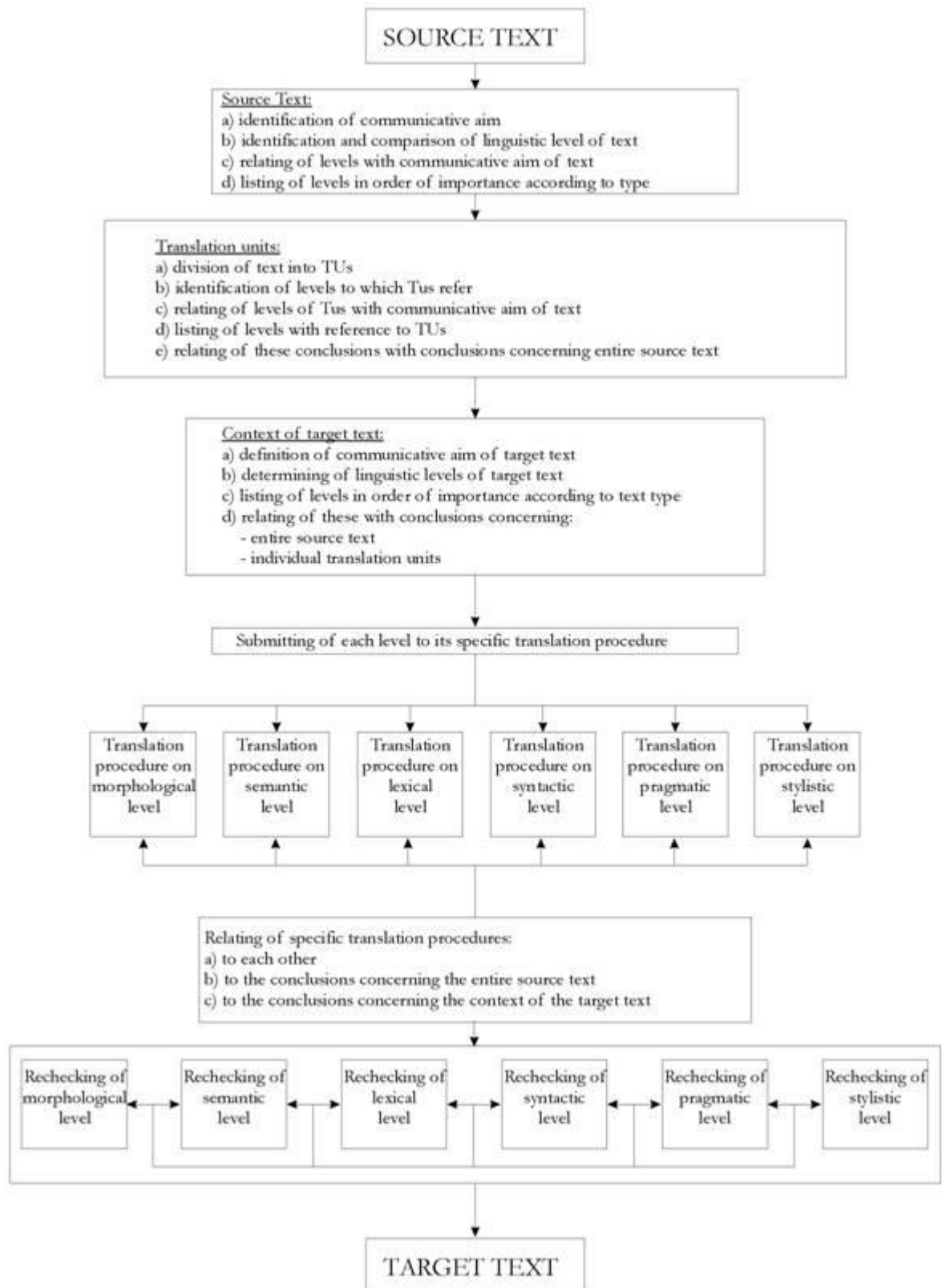


Figure 3

h. By taking into consideration the primary importance of the communicative functionality of a text in general and the way in which the communicative aim of this text is expressed in particular, we believe that translation should reflect each individual communicative aim, as governed by the six overlapping levels of Semantics, Lexis, Morphology, Syntax, Pragmatics and Stylistics (see fig. 4)

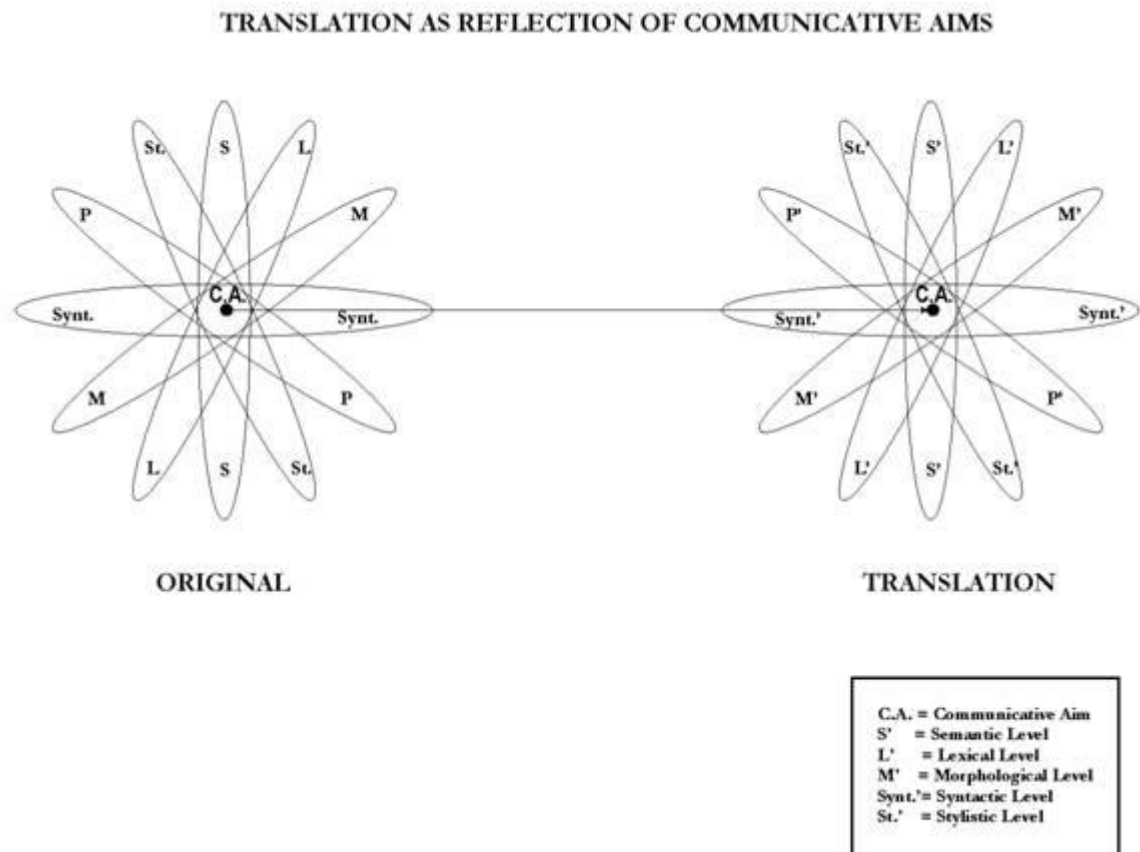


Figure 4
