Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies

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The relevance of utterer-centered linguistics to Translation Studies

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This study aims at exploring the contributions of utterer-centered linguistics to an objective and anti-dogmatic view of translation. Developed by French linguist Antoine Culioli, this formalizing cognitive model relates linguistic units to extralinguistic reality, connecting the utterances to the subjects that produce them and thus laying the foundations for defining the necessary conditions not only of possible meanings, but also of actual ones. After a brief discussion of linguistics' impact on Translation Studies, we illustrate, based on authentic translations and following Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher's lead, how such a framework could contribute to the understanding of language activity and to the systematic analysis of translation.

Keywords: linguistics, utterance, meaning, utterer-centered approach, speech situation

1. Introduction

In the systematic analysis and scientific study of translation the crucial role of linguistics-oriented approaches is indisputable. However, although Translation Studies owes much to linguistics, there is an increasingly skeptical attitude towards the latter. Is this attitude justifiable or does it stem from a restrictive conception of linguistics? In this paper we shall first explore the reasons for the insufficient recognition of the role of linguistics in Translation Studies. This will be followed by a discussion of the relevance of the utterer-centered approach, as developed by Culioli (1990), to the systematic analysis of translation. Following the method of Guillemin-Flescher (1981, 2003), we will attempt to demonstrate, with the use of specific examples (authentic translations in the language pairs Greek and French, Greek and Spanish), how the adoption of a theoretical framework relating the utterer and the utterance can clarify some aspects
of the translation process, and consequently provide a powerful tool for increasing the translator’s competence.

2. Linguistics and Translation Studies: a general survey

Linguistics, including specific models such as transformational, functional or systemic grammar, has contributed considerably to the development and establishment of Translation Studies as an academic discipline and field of knowledge. Analyses such as those proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Mounin (1963), Nida (1964) and Catford (1965) in the 1950s and 1960s, although concentrating on the word or phrase level, are considered significant for having led to the rejection of empiricism and thus to a more systematic approach to the study of translation. But even when the inadequacy of word and phrase level taxonomies became evident, the influence of linguistics remained substantial. Following the advances in language sciences, theorists tended to adopt concepts from other levels of linguistic analysis, such as register, discourse and pragmatic analysis, in order to explain translation as process or product (see for example Hatim and Mason 1990, 1997; Bell 1991; Baker 1992).

However, linguistics is no longer perceived as contributing sufficiently to the study of the translation phenomenon. According to Fawcett (1997: i, 1998: 120), the relationship between the two fields is now "uncertain, full of tensions and disagreements"; it is regarded as a "love and hate relationship". Indeed, recent developments rarely focus on, or even refer to, the relation between language activity and the act of translating. In order to give an independent epistemological status to the new discipline, scholars very often underestimate, or even neglect linguistics.

At the same time, it is important to note that many of those most vehemently opposed to the use of linguistics in translation are also those who either implicitly or explicitly use basic linguistic tenets in their theoretical works. When, for example, the representatives of the interpretive approach distinguish between the linguistic meaning of a word or a phrase and its sense in a given text (Lederer 1994: 89), they are applying text-linguistic principles. Furthermore, they consider that comprehension of a source text, the first of the three stages (comprehension – reformulation – verification) involved in the translation process, requires the definition of "the conceptual content of an utterance by drawing on the referential context in which it is embedded" (Delisle, cited in Salama-Carr 1998: 113).

Yet how can utterance and referential context be defined without a reference to the enunciation concept of Benveniste (1974: 80)? Moreover, is it possible, during the translating process, to associate conceptual content with referential context while bypassing language itself? In addition, given the fact that the referent of any linguistic feature exists per se, independent of language activity, it is difficult to elucidate, through linguistic analysis, any further associations between these features.
tions referring to notions (i.e. complex bundles of structured physical and cultural properties, consisting of a subject and a predicate), are organised on the utterance level. For example:

(1) Bernard ne croyait ni à dieux ni à diables. (Quéneau, Un rude hiver, p. 35)
   'Bernard didn’t believe either in Gods or in devils.'
   Ο Μπεννάρ δεν πίστευε ούτε σε Θεούς ούτε σε δαίμονες.
   (Βαρυχειμωνία, p. 26)
   'Bernard didn’t believe either in Gods or in demons.'

Diablos (devils), though it seems to have a meaning identical to that of δαίμονες in Greek, is translated as δαίμονες (demons). The plural Dieux (Gods) reminds us of Hellenic antiquity, in which there was an opposition between Gods and Demons; on the other hand, the singular number evokes the Judeo-Christian tradition. Thus, we have two different linguistic features (δαίμονες/devil, δαίμονες/demons) independent of the same notional referent. However, if we consider the same utterance in the singular, there is no change in translation:

(1a) Bernard ne croyait ni à Dieu ni au diable.
   'Bernard didn’t believe either in God or in the devil.'
   Ο Μπεννάρ δεν πίστευε ούτε στον Θεό ούτε στο δαίμονο.
   'Bernard didn’t believe either in God or in the devil.'

Finally, the influence of linguistics is clear in both functional and intercultural approaches to translation, because basic principles such as situational conditions, language functions, context, and extratextual as well as intra-textual factors of communication are taken into account, and because language and culture are two related concepts. The opposition to linguistics arises from the false perceptions they have about how linguistics can lead to an appropriate analysis and explication of translation and translating. Assuming a prescriptive view of Translation Studies, linguistics is expected to provide for the translator a predetermined model, or even a theory, which would offer ready-made solutions to any kind of problem. However, the aim of linguistics, if we adopt Guillemin-Flescher’s reasoning (1981), is instead to isolate and systematise the translator’s practice.

The objections raised against a linguistics-oriented approach to translation could be justifiable, if we considered linguistics as a science that tried to classify natural languages on the basis of their distribution or described them as a system of independent elements. But the objections are by no means justifiable if we consider linguistics as a science that studies the grounding of languages in situations, as we will see below. Certainly, linguistics is not the only way to account for the translation process, but it is
within the nature of the translation phenomenon itself. As Pergnier (1981: 255) points out, "l’objet de la linguistique est le langage, et la traduction est l’une des manifestations de langage parmi d’autres". It is now widely recognized that translation is not a simple process resulting from already existent equivalencies between the signs of two languages. Translating is not a process that replaces words by words or substitutes syntactic structures for other syntactic structures. It is, on the contrary, a mediated process of communication, a language activity during which the translator reconstructs the meaning of actualized utterances, that is to say sequences of words, which are endorsed by an utterer in a particular situation of utterance. Therefore, translation is an activity whose goal is to transfer the meaning of linguistic forms embedded in a specific speech situation in another language. It is an operation of recognition and representation of stable, analogic characteristics between languages. In other words, translation is possible due to a certain number of shared properties between the languages. As Jakobson (1959/2000: 116) has noted, "languages differ essentially in what they must convey and not in what they may convey".

Consequently, since the linguistic dimension needs to be taken into account in every systematic attempt to analyze the translation act, as well as in translator training, it is the particular type of linguistic approach to be applied that should be discussed. As the adopted linguistic models have proved to be inadequate in providing an efficient tool for translation theorists, and especially for practitioners, there arose a need for a framework that relates linguistic units and, by extension, a text that is subject to translation to extralinguistic reality. Such a framework should also take into consideration the relation between language and language activity, an activity that, according to Culiroi (1995: 23), "produces and recognizes forms, in the abstract sense of the term and not in the morphological sense".

3. The utterer-centered approach and translation

The utterer-centered approach, elaborated by Culiroi (1990) and applied in comparative studies of translated texts by Guillemin-Flesher (1981) and her followers, provides a powerful source of reflection. Culiroi (1990: 72) considers language not as a system but as a meaningful representational activity, which "is only accessible through text sequences, that is, through patterns of markers which are themselves traces of underlying operations," calculated relatively to the situation of utterance. He defines (1995: 12) linguistics as "the science whose object is language apprehended through the diversity of natural languages, and the diversity of texts, oral and written". Its aim is not to construct a universal grammar, but "to re-construct, by a theoretical and formal process, the primitive notions, elementary operations, rules and schemata which generate grammatical categories and patterns specific to each language. In short, the goal is to find the impoverished, reduced set of operations from which a language emerges that can be explained in its own terms".
Guillemin-Flescher (1981, 2003) argues that it is to establish, from translators' recurrent – and in some cases almost restricting – choices, the internalized criteria conditioning their activity.

One of the main factors in the utterer-centered approach is that it is a usage-based one, focusing on utterances and not on sentences, dealing with meaning and syntax as inseparable features in actual texts. Meaning in situations is considered as the result of a number of cognitive operations developed between the utterer, the utterance and the referential domain. The point of reference, the origin in all analyses, is the speaker: I, when he speaks: now, where he speaks: here, in other words, the enunciative coordinates defining the situation of utterance.7

This is of particular importance for the formalization of the translation process. Theorists usually consider that the translation process involves more than one stage. For instance, Garnier (1985: 112) distinguishes between the recognition stage and the production stage; Roberts and Pergnier (1987: 396) see the stages of comprehension and re-expression; and Ballard (1993: 230) the stages of comprehension and reformulation. But how can recognition or comprehension of a text be defined? Is it a simple procedure involving the identification of signifieds, as in the case of dictionaries, or a more complicated one involving the way languages shape our perceptions of reality? According to Culioli (1990: 74), to recognize an utterance and by extension a text means "to construct, or rather to reconstruct, patterns of markers which are the traces of operations to which we have no access". Thus, it could be argued that the noted differences or similarities between source and target texts are not subject to the translator's free choices on the syntactic or semantic levels. On the contrary, they are imposed to a large extent by the way discourse is organized in each language; i.e. by the text itself and the specific operations that the linguistic features mark in each language within the scope of a particular act of utterance. The way the French marker y is translated into Greek confirms this point:

(2) En 1540, deux cents familles marranes expulsées de Venise, y avaient trouvé un refuge et ...(Nehama, Histoire des Israélites de Salonique, book 4, p. 97)

'In 1540, two hundred Marrano families deported from Venice, had found refuge there and...'

Το 1540 διακόσιες οικογένειες Μαρράνων, που απελάθηκαν από τη Βενετία, είχαν βρει καταφύγιο εδώ και ... (Ιστορία των Ισραηλίτων της Σαλονίκης, volume 1, p. 454)

'In 1540, two hundred Marrano families which were deported from Venice, had found refuge here and...'

(3) Il est désormais défendu aux juifs de se rendre pour affaires dans cette ville maudite, d'y faire le commerce, d'y envoyer ou d'y acheter des marchandises et des denrées. (Histoire des Israélites de Salonique, book 4, p. 108)

'It is now on forbidden to Jews to go for business to this damned town, to trade there, to send there or to buy from there goods and foodstuff.'
The French spatial marker _y_ operates the repetition of a spatial locator already defined by the text without, however, specifying the viewpoint of the utterer endorsing the utterance. Since Greek lacks an analogous linguistic feature operating in the same way, _y_ is rendered by markers expressing clearly the relation installed by the utterer between the repeated locator and the site of spatial locations. In (2), since it indicates the space-locator of the narration, _y_ is identified with the site of the spatial relation and is translated by _e_δ_ω _[here]. In (3), on the other hand, _y_ refers to a place differing from the locutor-situation of the narration and is translated by _eκεί _[there].

Furthermore, Culioli (1995: 15) considers that linguistic models should attempt to find a certain level of homogeneity in languages displaying a high degree of heterogeneity. This would be of considerable benefit for translators, as they often have to deal with heterogeneous forms marking the same operation or, on the contrary, with homogeneous forms marking completely different operations. The way the French marker _on_ is translated in Greek serves as a good example of the first case. Since there is no unique formal equivalent in Greek, _on_ lends itself to a broad variety of translations: the passive form without agent, the passive impersonal phrase, the first person plural, the marker _κανείς_ [one], or the third person plural. A study of translated texts calls up a number of regularities that cannot be the result of purely arbitrary decisions. The decisions are guided by the degree of determination of the referential value of the marker, according to the utterance and the context. Thus, before searching for the linguistic features likely to operate as _on_ in the target language, the translator has to determine, with the aid of the context, the class of persons to which _on_ refers. If this class is indefinite, though it includes the utterer, _on_ acquires the value “me + others” and is translated by the first person plural, as in the examples below:

(4) _Souvenez-vous en prenant son nom, mon cher ami, qu'on vous le donne bien moins pour réjouir votre vanité, que pour..._ (Marivaux, L’île des esclaves, p. 429)

‘Remember by taking his name, my dear friend, that we give it to you less for delighting your conceit, than for...’

(5) _Να θυμάστε, αγαπητέ μου, ότι δέ σας δίνουμε το όνομά του για να κολακέψουμε τη ματαιοδοξία σας, αλλά για να τον τιμωρήσουμε για την αλαζονεία του._ (Το νησί των σκλάβων, p. 19)

‘You should remember, my dear friend, that we don’t give you his name in order to flatter your conceit, but in order to...’
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(5) ... Votre esclavage, ou plutôt votre cours d'humanité, dure trois ans, au bout desquels on vous renvoie si ...(L'île des esclaves, p. 430)

'Your slavery, or rather your humanity class, lasts three years, after which we send you away if…'

... Η σκλαβία σας, ἢ καλύτερα η μαθητεία σας σε σχολή ανθρωπών, διαρκεί τρία χρόνια: μετά τα σας αφήνομε να φύγετε, αν ... (To νησί των σκλάβων, p. 21)

'Your slavery, or better your studies in the school of humanity, lasts three years; after we let you go away if…'

(6) En général, comme on le voit par les responsa du temps, on a un grand respect pour... (Histoire des Israélites de Salonique, book 3, p. 79)

'In general, as one sees it from the Responsa of the time, one has a great respect for …'

Γενικώς, όπως το βλέπουμε στις responsa της εποχής εκείνης, έχουν μεγάλο σημασία για... (Ιστορία των Ισραηλίτων της Σαλονίκης, volume 1, p. 306)

'Generally, as we see it in the Responsa of that period, they have as big respect for …'

If, on the other hand, one builds a class of persons that the utterer scans one by one without singling out any particular element, it is translated in Greek by κανείς (Delveroudi 1993 : 80):

(7) Et le tout gratis, sans purgation ni saignée. Peut-on de la santé à meilleur compte. (L'île des esclaves, p. 430)

'And everything for free, without purgative or bleeding. Can one have health at a better price?'

Και όλα δωρεάν, χωρίς γιατρούς, και φάρμακα, [...] ... Μπορεί κανείς ν'αποκτήσει την υγεία του τόσο φτηνά; (To νησί των σκλάβων, p. 22)

'And everything for free, without medicines and drugs. Can one get his health so cheap?'


'We understand without effort into which pleasure the Marranoes rush.'

Εύκολα καταλαβαίνει κανείς με τι χαρά σπεύδουν οι Μαρράνες. (Ιστορία των Ισραηλίτων της Σαλονίκης, volume 1, p. 295).

'Easily one understands with what pleasure the Marranoes rush.'

(9) Oui; car quand on est le maître... (L'île des esclaves, p. 439)

'Yes; because when you are the master …'

Ναι, γιατί όταν είναι κανείς αφεντικό ... (To νησί των σκλάβων, p. 35)

'Yes, because when is one the master…'

It follows that, as the preference shown by the utterer for one grammatical structure rather than another is not accidental, the translational choices are not accidental either; they are recurrent and can be generalized. Contrary to the examples given above,
however, there are cases, such as the αφριστος [simple past] tense, where same forms might mark different operations. For example:

(10) Και τον πίστεψε βρε κυρά-Εκάβη; - Βεβαιώς όχι! Ήμουν κι εγώ ένας αφριστός
θωμάς σαν και σένα. Ξέχασε το επόνυμο, σκέφτηκα και rίξει το αδίκο στην
Αγία. (Το Τρίτο Στεφάνι, p. 77)

'And you believed him Misses Ecavi? – Of course not! I was also a doubting
Thomas as you are. He forgot the last name; I thought and blames the Saint.'

Et tu l'as cru vraiment, Ekavi? – Non, bien sûr! J'étais, moi aussi, incrédule,
comme Thomas et comme toi. Le moine a oublié le nom de famille pensai-je,
et rejetée la faute sur la Sainte. (Tahtsis, Le troisième anneau, p. 91)

Pero, bueno, Ecavi y tu le creíste? – Hombre! Claro que no! Entonces yo era
un incrédulo Tomás, como tú. Pensé que se había olvidado el apellido y le
echaba la culpa a Santa Anastasia. (La tercera boda, p. 78).

'And you have really believed him Misses Ecavi? – Of course not. I was, me
too, unbeliever, as Thomas and you. The monk has forgotten the last name I
thought, and blames the Saint.'

(11) έχει δίκιο η Ερασία. Αμάρτησε κι ο Θεός με τιμωρεί και ούτω καθέχες. Ένα
βράδυ μπήκα με' την κρεβατοκάμαρα μας και τον τόακωσα γονατιστό
μπροστά στο εικονοστάσι. (Το Τρίτο Στεφάνι, p. 30).

"Erasmia is right. I sinned and God punishes me," and so on. One evening I
entered our bedroom and I found him kneeling in front of the icons.

"Erasmia a raison. J'ai pêché et Dieu me punit." Et ainsi de suite. Un soir, en
entrant dans notre chambre je le surpris agenouillé devant l'iconostase. (Le
troisième anneau, p. 36).

"Tiene razón Erasmia. He pecado y el Señor me castiga" y asi constantemente.
Una noche al entrar al dormitorio me lo encontré arrodillado ante el iconos-
stasio. (La tercera boda, p. 34).

"Erasmia is right. I have sinned". And so on. One evening entering our bed-
room and I found him kneeling in front of the icons.

As illustrated above, the locating operation marked by αφριστος is not always the same;
it can be either an operation of differentiation or an operation of disconnection from
the time of the utterance. In the first case, the event referred to by the verb is con-
strued as taking place before the act of utterance but as nevertheless being linked to it,
and it is translated by passé composé in French and by pretérito perfecto in Spanish. In
the second one, the event referred to by the verb has no link with the act of utterance
and is translated by passé simple in French and by pretérito indefinido in Spanish.

Another point to consider is that the utterer-centered approach, being a consistent
and pragmatic model, can make the translators understand that each language consti-
tutes a semiotic system able to interpret any other semiotic system, and consequently
any other language, irrespective of the differences that might exist between them on
the predicative level. Here are two examples:

(12) *Bureau des objets trouvés.*
    'Office of found objects.'
    Γραφείο ἀπολευκθέντων ἀντικειμένων.
    'Office of lost objects.'

(13) Ξαφνικά της φάνηκε πως όλα εκείνα τα ειρήματα που ‘ταν στοιβαζόμενα όπως ὅπως
    στις βιτρίνες και στα ράφια είχαν ζωντανεύει...(Fakinos, Κλειστή ονο, p. 33).
    'All of a sudden she had the impression that all those findings which were piled
    somehow or other in the showcases and the shelves had come back to life…'
    Soudain, il lui semblait que toutes ces modestes découvertes qui s'éttaient mélées
dans les vitrines et sur les étagères avaient pris vie … (La vie volée, p. 42).
    'All of a sudden she had the impression that all those modest findings which
    were piled helter-skelter in the showcases and the shelves had taken life…'

In (12) there is a cause-and-effect relationship (lose – find) presented in a different way
in French and in Greek. The Greek predicate is constructed from a malefic perspective,
from the "loser's" viewpoint, with the second place of the predicative relation remaining
empty. On the other hand, the French predicate is based on the whole predicative
relation, from the "finder's" advantageous viewpoint. In (13), we have in Greek the
repetition of a linguistic feature (anaphoric adverb ὅπως ὅπως: somehow or other)
translated by pèle-mèle (any old way, helter-skelter). This cyclic form functions as a
qualitative operator of the predicative relation, and thus there is no extraction of a
specific occurrence. If on the contrary, ὅπως (as) appears in speech on its own, it intro-
duces a quantitative operation (ἐρει ὅπως/ας) of the predicative relation, extracting an
occurrence of the notional domain, constituted by the abstracted occurrences of a
given notion. By repeating the latter linguistic feature, the utterer runs over the whole
notional domain without being able to distinguish a particular occurrence, and we end
up with the identification of the linguistic future with itself, allowing the introduction
of a high degree of qualitative indetermination and the assignment of the meaning
pèle-mèle (any old way, helter-skelter) to the process. Indeed, despite the fact that lin-
guistic organization varies from one language to the other, steady analogous features
do exist beyond the diversity of categories and surface markers.

4. Conclusion

It seems, therefore, that instead of neglecting linguistics, it would be much more pro-
ductive to consider how the theoretical tenets arising from this particular field of
knowledge could be used to better elucidate the complexity as well as the multidi-
imensionality of translation. As Fawcett (1998: 124) notes, "modern linguistics clearly pro-
vides powerful tools for the analysis and understanding of language, and these tools ought to be part of the competence of every translator.” There is no doubt that the utterer-centered approach would contribute greatly to the understanding of language as well as to the systematic analysis of the translation process for the following reasons:

First, the utterer-centered approach, taking into account the operations marked by the speaker in producing an utterance, can aid translators in developing their ability to access meaning. As an approach identifying units of meaning, rather than units of linguistic form, it lays the foundations for defining the necessary conditions not only for possible meanings but also for actual meanings.

Second, as it connects the utterances to the subjects that produce them, it can provide coherent theoretical tools that clarify the verbalized intention of the author/utterer of a text and thus relate the extralinguistic functionality of a text to its linguistic components.

Finally, this framework could bring us closer not only to reaching an objective approach to translation, but to adopting an anti-dogmatic attitude regarding the way we translate as well. The emphasis would thus shift from “how” to “why”. Overcoming the age-old dichotomy of word and sense, translating is no longer regarded in antinomous terms, nor even perceived as a secondary communication, but as an act of meta-utterance.

Notes

1. M. Lederer (1994: 90), one of the main representatives of the interpretive approach, dedicates a whole chapter to pointing out the reasons for which translation should not be studied on a linguistic level.

2. By enunciation E. Benveniste means “activating a language by an individual usage act. […] is the very act of producing an utterance and not the text of the utterance. […] This is the act of a speaker who mobilizes a language for his own use”.

3. A. Culioli (1990: 69) argues that: “A notion should not be equated with lexical labels or actual items. Notions are representations (...). It should be obvious that notions have a status of predicative entities and could be described as unfragmented solid wholes; but they are apprehended through occurrences, i.e. distinguished through separate events, broken down into units (...) with variable properties”. J. Bouscaren, J. Chuquet, and L. Danon-Boileau (1992: 6) note that a predicative relation is a kind of “skeleton utterance”, validated when the utterer considers it as valid to a given locator: ex. John will go to London next week. The utterer anticipates the validation of the relation <John – go to London> relative to the future time locator next week”.


5. M. Pergnier (1978: 7) notes that “l’usage qui est fait au terme linguistique, s’agissant des problèmes de la traduction, est la plupart du temps restrictif. La plupart des linguistes qui se sont attiaches à étudier le problème de la traduction ont réduit celle-ci à l’aspect que Saussure appelait
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la linguistique de la langue, et encore n'en ont-ils retenu que l'un des aspects : l'étude de la langue comme système.

6. On the inadequacy of structuralist models see B. Hatim and I. Mason (1990: 26).

7. The term situation of utterance should be understood as referring to a linguistic concept not simply any particular situation. The two parameters concerned are the utterer and the time of utterance. Any situation of utterance can be defined in relation to these two terms.

8. The concept of location is linked to the idea of locating one term relative to another. A located term is one that has been situated, specified or determined. A. Culioli (1990: 180) notes that "to say that x is located relative to y, means that x is situated with reference to y, whether the latter, which is thus a locater is itself located by another location, or whether it itself is an origin".

9. According to J. Bouscaren, J. Chuquet and L. Danon-Boileau (1992: 2): "Locating a verb relative to the time of utterance involves marking if the event referred to by the verb is taking place at the time when the utterer mentions it or at a different time".

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