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Teaching Translation and Interpreting
Approaches and Methods

CONTENT

EDITORIAL

The publication "Teaching Translation and Interpreting" is a joint effort of leading experts in the field of translation studies at the Higher School of Translation and Interpreting, Linguistic University of Nizhny Novgorod, which is based on the many years of experience in educating and training of professional translators and interpreters.

The book provides detailed insights into the specific approach to translation and its basic principles, underlying the method and a description of how it is practically applied to teaching some particular types of translation and interpreting. This approach to translation is the governing principle adhered to by the school's faculty in the teaching practice. It results in the profound understanding of what is expected of a translator/interpreter in the event of translating. Therefore, the whole system of training translators/interpreters established in the Higher School of Translation and Interpreting at Linguistic University of Nizhny Novgorod is strictly practice-oriented.

The so-called "Nizhny Novgorod Method" developed by the Higher School of Translation and Interpreting goes back to Soviet times and is one of the great success stories of human sciences in today's Russia. Well-known interpreters and translators have been graduating from Nizhny Novgorod for over 60 years, alumni of the school successfully work in UNO, UNESCO and in other international, diplomatic and commercial organizations all over the world. Throughout its history the school has pursued the goal of training translators and interpreters who are able to satisfy the needs of translation clients and recipients in various environments of inter-lingual and cross-cultural communication: at international forums, industrial plants, hospitals, the customs office, in the civil service and in the military.

Today the Nizhny Novgorod Higher School of Translation and Interpreting is also a leading centre for translation didactics. Many translation and interpreting teachers have been retrained at the School's Centre for Translation Mastery. Textbooks, manuals and teaching aids written by the Higher School's professors are used in many Russian universities. The International Research Laboratory "Theoretical and Applied Issues in Translation Studies" contributes to the further development and promotion of the Nizhny Novgorod method.

The introduction to the Nizhny Novgorod Method is complemented by a contribution on intercultural competence by Klaus W. Waschik (Bochum) and Svetlana M. Kibardina (Vologda). Intercultural knowledge, attitudes and behavioural forms are among the core competencies of a highly qualified translator and interpreter, alongside primarily linguistic skills, which are also regarded as essential in Nizhny Novgorod.

TRANSLATION AS A PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY

Vadim V. Sdobnikov

Before speaking about didactics of translation[1], we should define precisely what translation is, what functions a translator performs and what tasks (s)he solves. Both students and teachers need to have a clear understanding of what translation is. In order to master translation skills, students must understand the essence of translation, while teachers must know the peculiarities of the translation activity completely to be helpful to students in class.

Unfortunately, many teachers of translation share a simplified, amateurish view of translation. They believe it is very simple to practice translation if one has a good command of the source language and the target language. With this approach, the translation process is viewed as a mere substitution of words of one language for words of another language. And when their attention is drawn to some mistakes in the target text, their explanation is very simple: "That's the way it is said in the original."

Teachers enthralled by these illusions can hardly teach students the fundamentals of the translator's profession. To be helpful to them, a teacher must meet at least two requirements: firstly, to be a good translator/interpreter, secondly—and this is most important—to have a clear understanding of the essence of the translation activity. True, many university professors think that they know what translation is. But, is their vision of translation correct? In other words, have they understood the objective laws of translating, the basic principles of the profession? It is not always the case. I admit that it is not necessary to know the definition of translation. What is essential is to have a clear vision of to what translation serves and what should be done to achieve the goal of translation.

What is Translation?

One might think that the question is irrelevant: it is alleged that every human being knows what the term implies and many have even seen translators and interpreters at work. Maybe for that reason, handbooks of translation and bulky volumes written by translation scholars are not that redundant when it comes to defining the term "translation". E.g., in the very first line of her book Juliane House confines herself to the

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1   In this section the term "translation" refers both to written translation and oral interpretation.

statement that "translation is the replacement of an original text with another text"[2] and then proceeds with the discussion of various kinds of translation.

Russian translatology is more abundant with definitions of translation. It is noteworthy that each of these definitions reflects the approach to translation assumed by the respective scholar. Therefore, the approaches to translation study are of paramount importance since they determine the ways and methods of solving problems related to translation activity, including problems of didactics of translation.

At the initial stages of translatology development, translation was seen and defined as *transformation* of a text in the source language (SL) into a text in the target language (TL). The translation process was viewed as a series of operations on the text, i.e. on its lexis and syntactical structures. Those operations included finding inter-lingual correspondences and transforming the vocabulary and syntax of the text where such correspondences were not available. Thus, the translation process was presented as a replacement of words and structures of one language by words and structures of another language with the aim of rendering the meaning of the text as well as its relevant formal features. This approach to translation may be termed as a *"text-oriented" approach*. According to it, an original text is seen as the only object to which the translator addresses his/her efforts. It seems that the translation process is triggered by the mere existence of the source text. To me it looks like a game: as if the ST says to the translator "Translate me!". The translator then performs some operations, mainly transformations, and eventually produces a text in another language. Game over.

With this text-oriented approach, nobody asks such questions as "What is the purpose of translation?", "Who needs the target text?", "How will the TT be used?". Translation as an activity becomes disconnected from real life, is not related to any real life situation. It means that the text-oriented approach to translation does not allow the investigation of all the factors that affect the process and result of translation, the taking into account of extralingual factors that influence the translator's decision-making.

The *communicative-functional approach* (*functionalist* approach in Western translatology) is opposed to the text-oriented approach. According to this approach, translation is viewed as a tool enabling people who are not familiar with the SL or people who speak different languages to perform their activities.

The communicative-functional approach has grown from ideas and concepts of many scholars. The most important contributions to its development have been made by E. Nida, O. Kade, A. Neubert, G. Jager, K. Reiß and H. Vermeer in the West,

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2   House, Juliane. Translation. Oxford University Press. Oxford, 2009. p. 3.

A. Shveitser, Z. Lvovskaya in Russia[3]. Nowadays this approach is gradually gaining favour over the text-oriented approach, at least in theoretical studies, and struggles hard for its position in didactics of translation.

The following provisions will help to understand the essence of the communicative-functional approach to translation.

People get engaged in communication when they have a certain need that can be satisfied only through communication with other people. The need in question originates from a certain activity performed by a communication actor, and relates to this activity. It is obvious that any activity is performed in the appropriate environment, in a certain situation. When activity is performed through communication, we deal with a communicative situation in which acting subjects interact. When people (actors) are divided by the language barrier, we deal with a situation of interlanguage communication. Interlanguage communication can be successful when it is mediated by a translator/interpreter. We can conclude that translation is done in some environment, in a communicative situation that occurs each time the actors want to satisfy their needs originating from their activities.

Each situation of interlanguage and cross-cultural communication has the following constituents: acting subjects speaking different languages, their activities (aimed at producing an object or at cognition), relations between the acting subjects, texts in different languages[4] and—a mediator (translator). This list of the situation constituents resembles very much the scheme of a communicative act presented by R. Jakobson. The essential difference is the addition to the list of such constituents as activities performed by acting subjects. It makes the environment of the interlanguage communication expand and include the constituent that precedes the translation event and the constituent that follows it. If we present an act of communication in a linear order, the actions performed by acting subjects will be terminal points. But such a scheme would be excessively simplified. In reality, the translation event can coincide in time with the subjects' activities; it occurs within these activities and, in a way, is "enveloped" by them. To be more exact, a translation act is "enveloped" by the whole structure of relations between the acting subjects.

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3   For more information about the communicative-functional approach in Russian translatology see: Vadim Sdobnikow. Der kommunikativ-funktionale Ansatz in den Arbeiten russischer Übersetzungswissenschaftler // Russische Übersetzungswissenschaft an der Schwelle zum 21. Jahrhundert / Birgit Menzel/Irina Alekseeva (Hg.) unter Mitarbeit von Irina Pohlan. – Frank & Timme GmbH. Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur. Berlin, 2013. p. 73–86.

4   In terms that are traditional for translation studies, texts in different languages are called a "source text (ST)" and a "target text (TT)" while acting subjects are called "ST sender" and "TT recipient".

From the above it follows that the view of translation as a transformation of a text is too narrow and does not correspond to what happens in reality. It is clear that translation is done whenever there is a need for it, and what a translator does is not the transformation of a text into another text but the creation of a speech product that can be used by acting subjects (mainly, by the TT receiver) in the interests of their production[5] or cognitive activities. Therefore, *the goal of translation is to satisfy the needs and expectations of the acting subjects in the given communicative situation, taking due account of the particulars of the subjects' activities and how the target text is supposed to be used.* This translation goal is of general nature and is applicable to any communicative situation in which translation is used as a tool of a broader activity, i.e. regardless of types of translation.

It should be noted that any translation event is initiated by a person or persons who are engaged in a certain activity or are responsible for it. In the Skopos theory elaborated by K. Reiß and H. Vermeer and extended by Ch. Nord this person is called the "initiator" (or commissioner). Each time we translate we must find out whose aim or intention has triggered a given act of communication in the multilingual environment. In other words, the question always arises: who is the initiator of the translation process? E. Gentzler argues that it can be a person, a group or an institution whose goals or aims may be very different from the source-text author, the target-text receiver and the translator[6]. Eventually, it is the initiator's goal that defines the character of the translation setting and determines the translation strategy. Using a mathematical term, I preliminarily state that translation strategy is a function of the translation setting which, in its turn, is a function of the initiator's goal. So, a translation event may be initiated by the client (who "buys" the translation service), the TT receiver, the ST sender or the translator. Situations in which various initiators initiate translation events will be considered below. Thus, *translation* may be defined *as the translator's speech activity oriented to the source text and aimed at producing a text in the TL (target text) that enables the translation initiator and/or the actors to perform their activities in the given communicative (extralingual) situation.*

We may conclude that according to the communicative-functional approach to translation: 1) translation must be treated as a professional activity performed in a certain setting (situation); 2) goals, intentions and expectations of communication actors must be taken into account by a translator in order to choose an appropriate translation strategy.

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5 "Production" here means any activity that results in some product, including an intellectual one; it does not mean narrowly "making goods for sale".
6 E. Gentzler, Contemporary Translation Theories. Clevedon, 2001. p. 73.

Communicative Situations in Which Translation Is Used

The above explanation is meant to show that translation is done in a certain communicative situation that can be also termed as a "translation activity setting". It goes without saying that communicative situations in which translation is used as a professional activity (CST) are manifold and diverse. I shall go as far as to say that each CST is unique in its character, which is explained by the uniqueness of each constituent of CST (communication actors, texts, relations between the communication actors, their goals, intentions and expectations).

Despite the striking diversity of CSTs it is still possible to divide them into certain types and subtypes using an appropriate criterion. In my view the purpose can be served by such a criterion as the degree to which translation is planned in a given communicative situation. In fact, all CSTs can be divided into two types or classes: 1) CSTs in which translation is initially planned; 2) CSTs in which translation was not initially planned. Accordingly, we shall name them as CST-1 and CST-2. Thus, a CST-1 translation is used as a means of establishing communication between the Sender of the SL and the audience of the TL. The Sender addresses his text directly to the audience that belongs to the target language culture, but it is obvious that communication between the Sender and the target audience can be successful only if translation of the ST is made. CST-2 is a communicative situation in which a text is initially addressed by the Sender to the audience of the same language (source language). As I have said, translation is not initially planned, for it is not required to establish communication between the Sender and the target audience (Receiver); translation is made *after* the communication between the two has been established, maybe many years after, and in a different setting and culture.

Diversified as they might be, all CSTs are characterized by *common* primary and secondary parameters, which makes it possible to unite them into certain subtypes. Among the *primary parameters* of a CST we find 1) the type of the translation initiator and his role in the CST, 2) the goal of translation, 3) the relations between the communication actors (formal/informal), 4) the environment in which the non-verbal activity is performed by the communication actors. Among the secondary parameters of a CST we can mention 1) the contact between the communication actors (direct/indirect), 2) the form of contact (written or oral), 3) the location of the communication actors (distant/contact). A combination of particular primary and secondary parameters determines the character of a given CST and allows it to be classed as a certain type and subtype since the number of such combinations is finite.

Let us illustrate it with a communicative situation that belongs to CST-1 type. This is a situation of contract supervision, i.e. a type of work aimed at the adjustment of imported equipment on site and performed by specialists who speak different languages.

The primary parameters of this CST include:
- **the translation initiator**: a company's management whose role is to organize the exchange of information between specialists so that they can ensure adjustment of the equipment and its effective operation;
- **the goal of translation** is to ensure the exchange of information between the specialists;
- **relations** between the communication actors are formal;
- the environment of performing the non-verbal (professional) activity: a personal meeting required to perform actions jointly.

The secondary parameters of this CST include:
- **the type of contact** between the communication actors—direct;
- **the form of contact**—oral;
- **the location** of the communication actors—contact.

All communicative situations of CST-1 type may be subdivided into two classes: CST-1 of formal nature and CST-1 of informal nature (CST-1$_{formal}$ and CST-1$_{informal}$ respectively). It is interesting that the character of relations between communication actors has nothing to do with the formal/informal character of a communicative situation. It is the situation itself, the setting in which a professional activity is performed, that is characterized as either formal or informal; in other words, the degree to which a situation is formal is inherent in the situation itself regardless of the type of relations between the communication actors. For example, the relations of two university professors or, to be more precise, their behavior will be strictly formal in the situation of a meeting of the department or school members and will be informal in the situation of a party organized to celebrate the end of the academic year. True, communication in these situations is monolingual, but the same example may be applied to situations of bilingual communication.

CST-1$_{formal}$ situations are subdivided into the following subtypes:
- CST-1$_{formal}$-official meetings and negotiations
- CST-1$_{formal}$-public presentations
- CST-1$_{formal}$-interviews
- CST-1$_{formal}$-roundtables
- CST-1$_{formal}$-contract supervision
- CST-1$_{formal}$-guided tours
- CST-1$_{formal}$-attendant interpreting service
- CST-1$_{formal}$-documentation translation.