The decision - Making Process
in Translation and the Unit of Translation

Layachi AISSI

University of Algiers 2

الملخص:

تعتبر الترجمة عملية معقّدة من اتخاذ القرارات وإتباع استراتيجيات لإيجاد حلول. وتتخذ القرارات على أساس المعطيات المتوفرة. وتظهر مشكلات الترجمة عندما لا يتوفّر المترجم على المعلومات الضرورية عند الترجمة. وهنا يأتي دور استراتيجيات الترجمة التي يستعملها المترجم بصفة واعية أو غير واعية. ونرى أن الترجمة مهما كان نوعها تستعمل نفس الاستراتيجيات حسب نوع النص ومستوى الوحدة الترجمية. ومن الصعب تحديد أو قياس مختلف الخطوات المتبعة في عملية الترجمة بسبب تداخلها وتفاعلها فيما بينها وخاصة وأنَّها عملية مستمرة من اتخاذ القرارات و الخيارات.

Keywords:

Translation process, decision-making, translation studies, procedures, units of translation, interaction, information processing.

Ordinary readers may seek to obtain information related to the content of an article or a novel; literary critics may be concerned be the subject of the novel, its characters, its linguistic features or its social significance.

The translator does not only seek to understand the content of the source language text (SLT) but must also analyze how the

content is organised and how to convert the content and organisation of the SLT into a target language text (TLT).

Translation is a complex communicative act, during which the translator operates on semantic units of language, analyzes them, clarifies their significance and finds correspondence in the other language. The extraction of meaning from SLT and its transfer to the TLT is the process of translation.

Translation process is mainly defined by SLT information processing and interaction with the linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge (J. Dancette, S. Halimi Meta, 2, 2005: 508)

Translation involves not only processing units but also knowledge. Decoding and reproduction of information depend on knowledge structuring and reactivation (ibid, 509)

How knowledge is organized? Knowledge representation differs from one individual to another. The translator as an expert organizes knowledge in blocs where concepts are interrelated. This type of organization will activate specific chunks whenever needed during the translation process by allowing efficient and reliable retrieval of information (Ericson & Kintsh 1995: 211).

Translation is a specific problem solving process. Translation strategies, i.e. transfer strategies are widely dealt with by some authors; however, decision making in translation was not dealt with in details. Perhaps the reason was the inherent complexity of the translation process itself. A formal model of the decision making is not applicable to translation except in very limited situations or for very basic syntactic structures.

Decision making in general is defined as a thought process of selecting a logical choice from available options. Each option is weighed and alternatives considered. Each choice or decision made will influence the next step of decision making

During the whole process of translation in which the levels of the translator's competence interact, the translator "finds himself in conflict – and - decision marked situations" (Wilss, 1982, 65). The decision making process is very active in the synthesis or re-expression phase during which the translator constantly makes choices between alternatives so as to match the SLT. In J. Levy words (1967, 1171):

"From the point of view of the working situation of the translator, at any moment of his work, translation is a DECISION PROCESS: a series of a certain number of consecutive situations - [...] - situations imposing on the translator the necessity of choosing among a certain number of alternatives".

Thus, the translator is often compelled to make a choice whenever he is confronted with a number of alternatives in conveying the meaning of an expression. For instance, at the word level, he has to make a decision as to the exact value or meaning of each linguistic item depending on the particular text and context in which it appears. Although, sometimes, the translator has some freedom of selection and choice from among several approximately TL equivalent possibilities; he, however, has to make a decision by giving priority to either the syntactic or the semantic perspective, or as in the case of literary translation to the stylistic perspective of the text. However, the translation process is an activity that is subject to certain cognitive mechanisms and laws, integrating factors such as context. An efficient translation is impossible without understanding the context

Many factors at different levels may affect the translation process. The main variables that affect the translation can be divided into three main groups:

- Features and characteristics of the SLT (text-type, genre, etc.)

- Conditions in which the translation process is carried out (deadlines, availability of additional information, etc)

- Features and characteristics of the target language

The predominant purpose of the transfer is the transfer of meaning of the TLT into the TL. Most translators and writers on translation emphasize the notion that translation is not a direct transfer from SL to TL, but that it can be achieved only through an intermediary stage.

In terms of an information processing description, the transfer phase is the phase where after decoding the SL sentence, for instance, the translator 'maps it into some abstract representation' (Massaro, 1978,389). However, no one knows what this abstract representation really is.

Linguists as well as psycholinguists tackled this 'notoriously difficult problem' of determining what a semantic representation is (see: van Dijk, 1983,71). In translation theory the content of the transfer phase was [and still is] a problem which exercised many' (Kelly, 1979,37). Some attempts were made to describe this phase through psychology and semiology which produced complex schemes to illustrate the mental processes concerned. However, they were faced with the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of describing how meaning is represented in the human mind, since 'that blackest of black boxes always turned out to be the centrepiece' (Theo Hermans, 1985,9-10).

We do not wish to embark on investigating how meaning is represented within memory, for this is beyond the scope of the present study. However, we shall present, in brief, Nida's (1964) and Taber's (1972) generativist hypothesis concerning the transfer of meaning from SL to TL. Starting from the distinction made between the surface structure and the deep structure, Nida and Taber based their model on the notion that deep structure is identical to semantic structure (see chapter two). For Taber and Nida, the deep structures of all languages are, to a great extent, similar. This suggests that by transferring the deep structure at a 'near— kernel' level (basic sentence) from SL to TL 'one is least likely to distort the meaning' (Nida, 1969,492).

According to Taber (1972), one aspect common to all languages is that, on the semantic level, they essentially comprise objects, events and abstractions. That is, any concept occurring in any language will refer to an object, an event, or an abstraction. Objects can represent inanimate and animate things, events are actions and processes, and abstractions include qualities and quantities. A fourth category may be added namely relations which are the relationships between any pair of object, event, abstraction, expressed by coordination, simultaneity, sequence, etc. Relations refer to semantic relationships between items and include all those relations posited between semantic units. Generally speaking, as suggested by Taber (1972), the semantic representation, or the derivation of the meaning of a sentence is based on discovering the semantic relations between its units which are expressed in terms of objects, events, and abstractions.

The grammatical classes of the Linguistic units differ from their semantic classes, for there is a great deal of skewing between semantic classes and grammatical classes; for instance the sentence: *"He began to speak as soon as he saw me"* is grammatically a subject, predicate, object, adjunct (SPOA) sentence as far as its order of grammatical units is concerned. But in the semantic structure to speak' which is a verb (an event) is being used as an object. This suggests that nouns do not correspond automatically to objects, or verbs to events, etc. There is a skewing between semantic classes and grammatical classes. The translator needs to be aware of this kind of skewing when he translates. Most importantly, this shows that translation should not be viewed as a one-to-one correspondence.

If translation was only a matter of matching TL words from a dictionary to words in SLT, machine translation would have been a purely technical problem. This, however, is not the case, and the failure of machine translation to equal human translation shows that translation is not a mechanical process but a process involving non-observable phenomena namely 'mental processes' which cannot be studied empirically. Thus, we do not know exactly and precisely what goes on in the translator's mind. Little if anything is known of how data is stored and processed in the brain.

Nevertheless, we assume that the central focus in data storage and processing in the translator's brain is 'meaning'. The SLT symbols and structures are processed to derive the meaning contained in the SL message. Afterwards, the meaning of the SLT is cast into the TL symbols and structures which should be organized in the form required by the target language conventions (see Nida, 1964,145-146).

The problem of describing the abstract representation of meaning and how this meaning is transferred from one language to another can be related to the problem of finding the appropriate unit of translation. Indeed, the problem of finding the appropriate unit of translation is also a problem of finding at which level of meaning transfer is best carried out..

The Unit of Translation

A language is thought, by Wirth (1985,3), to be a collection of structures that are the bearers of meaning'. These structures are 'linguistic units of varying types that are related hierarchically —

morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences' (ibid.). Thus, meaning, following Wirth's suggestion, can be carried by any of these units. The unit of meaning and consequently the unit of translation may vary accordingly.

The unit of translation (UT) is generally defined as the smallest translatable segment of the discourse, that **is,** a segment of text which is small enough to be isolated and large enough to be translated as a whole (see: Vinay and Darbelnet, 1958, Van Hoof, 1978:89, and Schumacker, 1975:31). This definition claims that any unit ranging from the word to the sentence can be isolated and translated as a whole. Thus, UT according to this definition can be related to any grammatical unit: a word, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence.

According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1958,16), UT is "le plus petit segment de l'énoncé dont la cohésion des signes est telle qu'ils ne doivent pas être traduits séparément" i.e the smallest segment in which the cohesion of the signs is such that they cannot be translated separately. They also stipulated that UT can be situated at any level. It can be a word, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence.

Nevertheless, they stressed that 'le traducteur... part du sense' (ibid.37), that the translator translates ideas and not words. Thus, UT should be a semantic unit (unite semantique). By considering as equivalents the terms 'unité de pensée', 'unité lexicologique' and 'unité de traduction', Vinay and Darbelnet made the concept of UT more vague. The concept of UT is made so undetermined that the problem of delimiting it structurally appears without solution.

The task of finding a reliable unit of translation has been dealt with by linguists and translators alike. It has been, as Vasquez — Ayora (1982,70) puts it: "one of the most elusive and controversial question in the history of translation theory"; he believes that "the need for a concrete and operational unit as a text segmentation measure, semantic or otherwise is indeniable".

Indeed, the translator should know at what level he should translate. Should he take the sentence, the clause, the phrase, the word, or the morpheme as a basic unit of translation?. This controversy is reflected in the different opinions of both linguists and translators.

Different approaches to translation lead to different views and definitions of the appropriate unit of translation. Any attempt

at delimiting the units of translation within a text mist take into consideration different criteria ranging from the linguistic factors involved in the linguistic analysis to the extra — linguistic factors involved in the semantic and pragmatic analysis of the SLT and the transfer of SL message into the TL.

The different approaches to translation and the large body of literature on translation, with all the differences in opinion, gave no definite formal boundaries to UT. This may have resulted, as Vasquez — Ayora (1982,70) suggests, because "there are no external criteria for delimiting translation units so that the translator may know them beforehand in order to identify them".

In this paper, it is believed that since translation is based entirely on rendering the meaning, UT ought to be a unit of meaning. But, as was mentioned earlier, the unit of meaning cannot be delimited beforehand since it can be anything from the word to the whole text. Hence, we assume that the boundaries of a unit of translation depends on the level at which meaning is sought.

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