

Center for Translation Studies
University of Texas at Dallas

Translation Studies Research

Translation research addresses the problems that are involved in the transferal of meaning from one culture to another. The question of how successfully situations in one language can be recreated in another is the foremost concern of the translator. It is important to point out that not all cultures interpret the same situations in the same way. Although human intellectual and emotional needs do not differ drastically from one culture to another, the way we perceive and interpret cultural situations can differ substantially from one language to another. As there are no two words within the same language that have exactly the same meaning, no word has its exact equivalent in another language. Words carry with them the atmosphere and rhythm of a cultural, historical, and aesthetic tradition. Formulations that express emotional states, for instance, gain a certain refinement in one language that cannot be reproduced with the same intensity in another language. In order to arrive at a systematic approach to the study of translation, the nature of the act of reading, of interpretation, and of communication has to be investigated. Methodologies derived from the art and craft of translation can shed light on these activities and offer new ways of improving cross-cultural communication. The basic starting point for all of our research is the assumption that all acts of communication are acts of translation. This assumption extends the research even into the fields of Cognitive Sciences and Artificial Intelligence. Translation models can provide insight into the patterns of human thinking and how the various levels of semantic connotations and interactions of words shape the textual context of a work.

The single most important area of our research is the exploration of the methods that can be applied to the successful interpretation of texts in their cultural context. This research involves a complex act of scholarly reconstruction and textual interpretation that synthesizes semantic, cultural, aesthetic, and historical factors. Interpretation begins with the recognition that each word represents a concept or reflects an emotional landscape. All research into the interpretive act of translation has to respond to the following questions: what specific procedures of research have to be initiated in order to find possible solutions to the problems posed by the text? How does a translator establish an interpretive perspective vis-à-vis a given text? How can translation methods be applied not only to the verbal arts but also to the musical and visual arts? The vitality of translation research resides in its constant effort to solve problems encountered in the

transferral of meaning from one culture to another. Translators continuously assess the semantic, cultural, historical, and psychological boundaries of words as isolated phenomena and as they exist in the overall context of a given text.

One of the most observable results of translation research is the impact translation has on the practice of reading a text. Reading is by its very nature a form of dialogue and communication with the literary text. And based on our fundamental assumption that all acts of communication are acts of translation, we consider reading in itself already an act of translation. Reading should be seen as a continuous process of reconstruction. Words gain meanings through their associations with other words, through the link to their cultural and historical past, and through their rhythmic and sonic constructions within a given sentence. Words by themselves have very loose boundaries. In most instances, they are too general and do not immediately reflect the specific connotations that a writer might bring to a particular object. When we pronounce a word such as "table," each reader will have a slightly different image of a table. No two people will visualize the shape of a table in the same way. Thus, before any interpretation can take place the translator has to visualize all the etymological, cultural and historical associations that become active in a word within the context of a text.

The communication with a literary text from the translator's point of view requires that the translator establish a particular perspective toward the text. Our research investigates the ways by which we establish perspectives of interpretation. In concrete terms, perspectives can be studied through multiple translations of the same text. In pursuing the perspectives of multiple translations, one recognizes that not only is each word in a language a perspective, a way of seeing in and of itself, but also that each language per se builds a larger way of seeing. Translation research sensitizes the reader and scholar to the various perspectives that cultures have established through the specific nature of their language structure and usages.

Another direct result of our investigation of the interpretive act is to further understanding of the thought processes involved in translation activities. One of the distinctive features of these various thought processes is their integrating power. Each word in a culture functions as a semantic, cultural, and historical entity whose underlying associations of meaning have to be transferred as a totality into the cultural context of a new language. In the process of translating a literary work the translator will have to draw information from various disciplines in order to do justice to its specific textual situations. This reconfirms

that the translator is continuously at work in a problem solving environment. The means and techniques of one single discipline are rarely sufficient to provide adequate solutions. As a result, translation thinking promotes a form of interdisciplinary thinking.

One last major emphasis of our research is to develop methods and techniques to evaluate existing translations. Such evaluative methods will have a major impact on defining the future direction of Translation Criticism as a new field of literary scholarship. In summary, the specific research dimensions in translation studies at The University of Texas at Dallas represent a rigorous and non-traditional investigation into new methods of interpreting literary texts with the understanding that these methods can also be transferred to the interpretation of visual and musical texts.