Translation & discourse

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ABSTRACT. This paper aims at discussing the relationship between Discourse Analysis and the process of translation. It is also an attempt to apply Fairclough's (1992) three dimensions of discourse: text, discursive practice and social practice into text translations. The communicative dimensions, lying beneath the lines of a text, demand from the professional translator a discursive competence which requires not only a mere search for meanings from one language to another, but it requires, above all, a search for understanding the relationship between text, discourse and social practice - between text and society. By looking at translation as a process rather than a product, translators would understand that translation is mostly a communicative process in which they play a specific social role within two different social frameworks.

Key words: translation, text, discourse, process, communication.

RESUMO. Tradução & Discurso. Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir a relação da Análise do Discurso com o processo de tradução. É também uma tentativa de se aplicar o conceito tridimensional do discurso de Fairclough (1992): texto, prática discursiva e prática social à tradução como um todo. Dessa forma, a tradução é analisada como um processo e não como um mero produto final. As dimensões comunicativas que permeiam um texto exigem do tradutor profissional uma competência discursiva que não implica somente na busca por significados de uma língua para outra, mas acima de tudo, na investigação, reflexão e interpretação da relação do texto com o discurso e com a prática – do texto com a sociedade. Considerando a tradução como processo e não como produto, os tradutores passam a entendê-la como uma atividade comunicativa na qual desempenham papéis sociais específicos na relação de dois universos culturais diferentes.

Palavras-chave: tradução, texto, discurso, processo, comunicação.

Some remarks on translation context

In some research areas and also in many scientific papers and magazines, translation has been taken as a product rather than a process. Readers in general perceive translation as an end-product, which besets all attempts to evaluate translation by analytic comparison between source text (ST) and target (translated) text (TT). This product-to-product comparison overlooks the decision-making or the communication process underlying translation. Examples of such concept are found in articles published in magazines such as: *Carta Capital* (October, 2002) - *Nos Labirintos da Tradução,* and *Superinteressante* (October, 2002) - *Tragédias da Tradução - This way it doesn't give*, in which authors criticize and satirize some non-successful translations of books, movie subtitles, manuals, etc. They criticize inexperienced translators who show lack of style, technique and low level of language proficiency to understand the author's original ideas. As mentioned above, this sort of criticism always takes into account the end-product but never the process, as for example the problem of contextualizing the text, its social function (genre) and other questions involving the negotiation of meanings between producers and receivers of a text. However, it is common knowledge that the globalization process, followed by the technological advent (e.g. cable TV, computers, Web, American movies, corporate business culture, etc.) brought along the ideology of a national and international competitive society, in terms of cultural, social and economic production.

In all productive areas the need for 'communicating' in English has been requested either by reading, writing, speaking, publishing in scientific field or by the economic growth or still mere professional updating. Thus, translation demand (literary or technical) has grown reasonably in the last decades. An example of such demand is noticed by the increasing numbers of machine translators found in the World Wide Web: Google, Babel Fish, and TraduzWeb, to name a few.

Recent articles discuss the reliability of these web

tools due to their limitations in terms of decoding meanings from one language to another and of contextualizing or localizing ideas and terminology. Another important and crucial point regarding translation as a product is the one related to the publishing market. Editors or publishers do not realize properly the importance of the process of translation. While hiring translators, for example, they do not seem to be aware of all the implications lying behind the so-called end-product. In general they follow the current economic policy of some corporate culture of saving money or following the competition market by hiring unqualified translators and/or by putting the product (the book or whatever) into the market as soon as possible, overlooking the so important process of refining and revising the translation work, for example.

On behalf of the end-product most publishers, then, underestimate the process of translation. Therefore, research shows that there is a need to discuss the fact that the process of translation is a much more complex one, it is a communication activity which has further important dimensions rather the linguistic one, which are the analysis of a text as a discursive practice and as a social practice as well.

The process of translation: beliefs and strategies

While studying language learning / acquisition we learn that strategies play a very important role during the process. At the same level, beliefs have gained such a role. Researchers say that beliefs or presuppositions about what learning a language is like may determine the resources and the means learners use to solve every problem along the way (Jacobson *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, the language learner as well as the translation trainee, guided by adequate beliefs about the process, make their choices of resources more appropriately, leading to more successful results. According to Alves *et al.* (2000), beliefs about translation and the translator are all those concepts and perceptions one has of what the act of translation means, what a good translation is, the translator's role, etc. These beliefs tend to affect the translator's performance positively or negatively. In order to be successful, the translator needs to play a broader social role and consequently he needs to be

more critical and ethical regarding the end-product (translated text).

However, in order to be aware of the complexity involving the translation process, the translator needs to acquire the various levels of knowledge and abilities which constitute the translating process such as: reading, reflection, research, interpretation and writing - the latter being an essential skill for the translator's good performance. During the process of reading, interpretation and (re) creation of a text, many doubts and questions may arise which will probably be answered based on his/her previous linguistic or cultural knowledge - also called 'internal aids strategies', or/and on information from sources outside the text: dictionaries, encyclopedias, parallel texts, web and others - also called 'external aids strategies' (Alves *et al.*, 2000). Besides these two kinds of strategies, it is very important to highlight other two relevant strategies in the translation process: 'the macro and microtextual analyses'. The macrotextual analysis, on one hand, deals with genre and rhetorical aspects of text, including contextual analysis at its two levels: (i) textual (cohesion and coherence at discourse level), and (ii) co-text or genre (where the context of situation is taken into account). The microtextual analysis, on the other hand, deals with the use of strategies based on non-equivalence problems, which can be lexical or grammatical.

Consequently, the acquired and improved knowledge of *what, how, when* and *where* to use those strategies constitutes significant abilities to qualify successful translators, or better, translators who are able to ground their professional expertise on suitable beliefs and use their strategies to solve problems efficiently and successfully.

Therefore, the strategies translators may use are several. They may refer to either contextual considerations of the translation activity or to micro and macrotextual linguistic aspects analysis searching for adequate solutions and, consequently, for the production of a translated text which reflects the original or source text information in its most reliable form. These strategies, then, are used in order to satisfy the prospective or potential readers. To better understand the aspects involving the process of translation, let us take a look at Figure 1 - a model of translation process, adapted from Königs (1987).
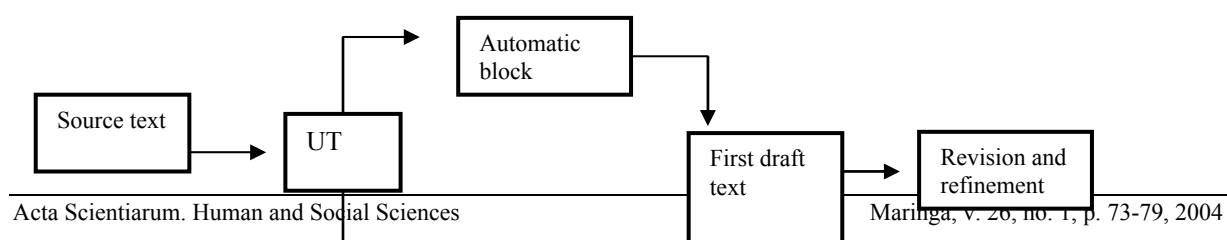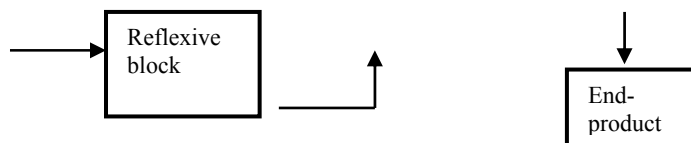
Figure 1. Translation Process Flow (in Alves *et al.*, 2000, p.114).

In this model, the activities are grouped in two blocks: Automatic Block (AB hereafter) and Reflexive Block (RB hereafter). In the AB, the Units of Translation (UT hereafter), which may be segments of a text previously established by the translator, varying from a group of words to a paragraph, are automatically processed because they have a pre-established equivalence. e.g. In the sentence: *He's here.* (*Ele está aqui*). The decisions made were all pre-internalized by the translator, as *he* (*ele* - as a singular personal pronoun for the third person), *is* (*está,* not '*é'* because of the adverb *here* meaning *estar aqui).* All these questions had already been solved and therefore they were automatically processed in the AB. But, analyzing a sentence like: *They're just six years old.* (*Eles têm apenas 6 anos*), having in mind an inexperienced translator, he/she may have problems in translating the verb *to be* in *'ter',* since in Portuguese, age relationship is given with such verb, which requires the transportation of the UT to the RB. Sometimes, a translator may make a mistake of a UT in the AB and does not correct it because of the automatization process during the UT translation. That may also occur with the so-called false friends or false cognates. For example, in the UT: *trabalho* **elaborado** *por ... (study* **elaborated** *by ...).* In the English version, there was a mistake while processing the false friend *'elaborated',* which frequently means in Portuguese *detalhado* and not *elaborado* , meaning *realizado, executado.* A more adequate or equivalent translation for the word *elaborated* would be *carried out* or *developed.* Then the English version for the UT *trabalho elaborado por* would be *study carried out by.*

However, translation theorists say that most of the translation process is carried out by multiple means of the cognitive system. In other words, in order to translate, there is a need to combine different strategies of internal and external aids and integrate them to make appropriate decisions. This stage, the most useful, is accomplished in the RB where the internal and external aids, the priorities and omissions of each piece of information and still the revision and refinement of the text as a whole are processed.

Translation & Discourse

After these remarks on what the process of translation is, I intend, from now on, to focus this discussion on translation as a communication activity and not as a mere product, involving the negotiation of meanings between producers and receivers of a text. In this sense, the discussion on translation activities goes far beyond the linguistic aspects underlying a text but it regards the social, cultural and psychological dimensions of the process. Thus, the translation activity should be studied as a discursive practice, where different reflexive actions are performed, such as: reading, interpreting, analysis, making decisions and others, which surpass the level of words and sentences reaching the level of discourse.

According to Fairclough (1992), discourse is the relationship between text and social practice. He conceptualizes discourse in three important dimensions: *text, discursive practice* and *social practice* (Figure 2). Shortly, we could say that the *text* is the discursive event, the central part of the discourse which deals with the linguistic aspects of the language; the *discursive practice* is related to the text production, distribution and consumption of the text and involves the analysis of the text as discourse - the interpretation of ideas which brings about the social function of a text; and finally, *the social practice* establishes the relationship between discourse and the social structure as a whole - how the discourse articulated by the text may affect current society, by changing values, behavior, concepts, etc.
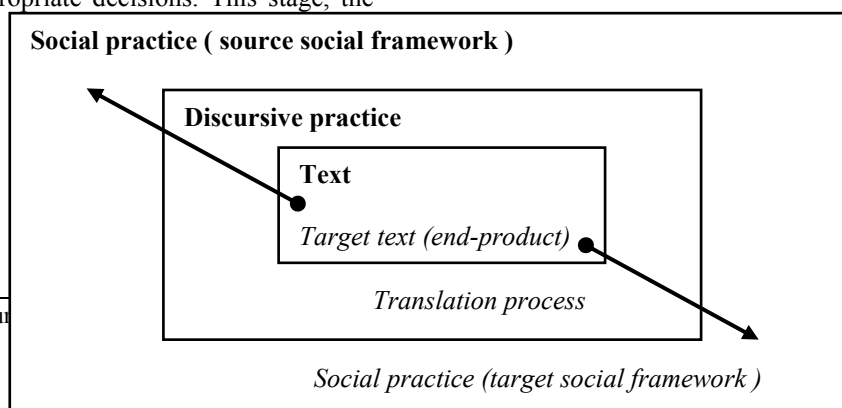
Figure 2. Adapted from Fairclough, 1992, p.73.

Figure 2 shows that translation is a means of examining the role of language in social life. Translators need to negotiate meanings between two social frameworks - the source and the target culture, by creating a new act of communication out of a previously existing one. In studying this complex process at work, we are seeking insights which take us beyond translation itself, towards the whole relationship between language activity and the social context in which it takes place. In order to accomplish the task of translation and reach the final product, translators go through the process of translation where dilemmas need to be solved and decisions need to be made as well. Readers in general, perceive only the end-product, a result of a decision-making process. What is available for scrutiny is usually the end-product (text), the result of translation practice rather than the discursive practice itself. In other words, this work intends to look at the translation as a process, instead of a product, as a discursive practice instead of a close comparison of source text and target text structure or texture. The view that underlies Figure 2 is the view of translation as a process, as a discursive practice involving the negotiation of meaning between producers and receivers of texts, between one social context and another.

Consequently, if we look at translation from such perspective, we realize that translation is mostly a communicative process in which the translator occupies a social role within different social frameworks. While solving problems and making decisions between the two languages (source and target texts), he/she needs to take into account the importance between text and context and the hierarchical relationship between text, discourse and social framework.

Thus, analyzing translation as a communicative activity where translators are readers, interpreters, writers and above all discourse analysts, we understand that translation is not a mere linguistic code receiving or sending activity related to exclusive lexicogrammatical aspects of language, but it is rather an identification of text genre, contextualization of facts and ideas, taking into account the author's original information and the target readers or receivers of the translated text. Besides having in mind both texts: source and target, translators need to acknowledge the other two dimensions of discourse: discursive practice - where the process of translation

occurs and social practice - where the communicative transaction takes place within different social frameworks.

Final remarks

In summary, the translation process involves certain complexity which goes far beyond the beliefs established by the society, in which translators are most of the time taken as traitors and translation as a simple end-product. No matter the educational or business market field, mistaken concepts and suppositions regarding the translation process are made which interfere with the translator's recognition as a professional or as an established profession. This recognition will, at the most, be achieved according to the growing level of awareness towards the nature of the translation process, its peculiarities such as the acquired knowledge and expertise through the development of strategies, linguistic proficiency and discourse analysis improvement related to the macro (discursive) and micro (linguistic) components of a text, added to professional behavior, etc. According to Alves (1997), in order to be successful and to manage the process of translation, translators should be aware of important aspects, such as:

a) The different stages in the translation process in order to be able to manage it.
b) The higher the awareness of the strategies, the better results are.
c) Self-assurance, good performance and high quality end-product will depend on the translators' level of managing and awareness of the process.

Besides that, I would also assume that by taking into account the three dimensions of discourse: text, discourse and social practice, translators would be looking at translation as a communication activity rather than a mere linguistic one, as some theorists have already pointed out. New and different knowledge should be accessed in order to broaden horizons and raise new ideas to solve problems, defend their solutions when criticized and thus they would be able to grow professionally in skills, knowledge, disposition, demeanor, and credibility. Including translators as discourse analysts is one of the first steps for such important change of beliefs and behavior in our current society. By relating the translator's view to the discourse analysis we intend to focus the translators, students and researchers'

attention to translating as a communicative process which takes place within two different social contexts or frameworks.

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