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YMER

Open Access | Peer reviewed | Scopus Active 2024 | Care UGC Group- II Journal | ISSN - 0044-0477



Title

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Has been published in

YMER: VOLUME 23, ISSUE 01, JANUARY - 2024



Scopus



OPEN ACCESS

Editor-in-chief


(James Gaskin)

The Shortcomings of Comparative Stylistics in Spite of its Importance in Learning Translation

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Abstract:

No doubt, learners of translation find difficulties to transfer texts from one language to another, especially specialized ones, such as economic, legal, medical and literary texts... This is why they need to use translation theories, strategies and basic techniques to better understand the source text and find the most appropriate methods for translating it correctly into the target language. Learners generally choose linguistic theories by first opting for Vinay and Darbelnet's Comparative Stylistics, as these two Canadian theorists established, in their teaching manual published in 1958, the basic translation techniques that make it easier for learners to assimilate the act of translation. But is Comparative Stylistics really enough to overcome the different problems of translation, particularly in the transferring of various meanings linked to the sociolinguistic and cultural contexts that differ from one language to another? This is the question we are going to develop in this paper in order to highlight the importance of linguistic theory and identify its real shortcomings in the translation of specialized texts in particular. At the end, the study will reveal the other theories that learners should consider to help them find solutions to the various translation difficulties.

Keywords:

Linguistic theory; Techniques; Transfer; Translation Difficulties; Translation Theories.

1. Introduction

Translation learners must have some skills to be able to assimilate and practice the translation process properly. They must have linguistic skills, but also extensive cognitive knowledge, which means that they will have to handle at least two languages (source and target languages) and have a cultural background that can help them translate texts from different fields. Translation is multidisciplinary, which requires the learner to spare no effort to be able to translate not only general but also specialized texts through a good training in a theoretical framework supporting its practical translation courses. To overcome his first translation difficulties, he takes as a theoretical basis the 7 translation techniques of Vinay and Darbelnet. But is Comparative Stylistics really sufficient to resolve all his difficulties in translating? Comparative Stylistics can be interesting to distinguish how languages work and translate simple general texts but what about technical and literary texts which could create difficulties in the choice of translation strategies and techniques in front of the limits of Comparative Stylistics. We will try to emphasize the importance of the linguistic approach of Vinay and Darbelnet for the learner but we will also have to reveal its shortcomings and the necessary contribution of the other theories of translation to help him understand and accomplish the translation process.

2. Learning Translation: Why and How?

Translation has always been a means of contact between several languages and a bridge linking the cultures and knowledge of different civilizations. But we can say that it is now more essential than ever, given new world factors such as Globalization and new technologies, which have reduced the world to a small village requiring cohabitation, exchange and interaction in all areas of life and knowledge. So, “Nowadays translation is one of the key topics not only for professionals in the fields of linguistics and education, but also for social, political and economic zones.”(Kobyakova & Shvachko, 2016, p.9)

Translation sounds important around the world where over 7000 languages are spoken, it allows people to communicate and understand each other since it let them exchanging their thoughts, cultures and knowledge without been obliged to learn all languages.

Every one (e.g. a student) who wants to study Translation at university should have a command of at least one foreign language, or at most two, in addition to his mother tongue, and should also concentrate on learning translation strategies and techniques during his studies in order to have a successful training responding to his needs and expectations. Since “Teaching translation strategies has become a relevant part of university translation courses.”(Aguado-Giménez & Pérez-Paredes, 2005, p. 294), the student must take these modules seriously in order to acquire the theories and methods needed to understand the act of translation and to put its different stages into practice.

3. Translation and the learning process:

Translation is not reduced to transfer words and sentences from one language to another. It is, according to Catford (1965, P. 20), “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)”. In other hand, “finding equivalences to convey the same meaning of a source language text in a target language is not always an easy task. The difficulties associated with the process of translation have been widely commented on by scholars and professional translators.” (Aguado-Giménez & Pérez-Paredes, 2005, p. 294) This leads us to say that the learner plays an important role in the translation learning process, where he is expected to follow the teacher's instructions and, at the same time, be at the focus of the operation itself, because the student must be alive and interactive through his dynamic participation in the theoretical and practical lessons given. Among other things, he must do his homework and carry out the documentary research needed to understand his courses. He must also give presentations that test his written and oral skills, encouraging debate and exchange ideas that may shed light on the subjects covered in the courses.

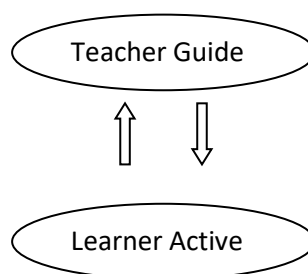


Fig. 1 Translation learning process: Teacher and learner in classroom

4. Translation theories:

There are undoubtedly different translation theories which can help the translator to deal with the problems that can happen during the translation process. According to Newmark (1981:19), “translation theory is concerned mainly with determining appropriate translation methods for the widest possible range of texts or text-categories. It also provides a framework of principles, restricted rules and hints for translating texts and criticizing translations, a background for problem solving.”

The translator tends to resort translation theories that can solve some, if not all, of the problems arising from the act of translation. So he chooses the procedures and techniques established by the many theories and approaches according to the type of text to be translated, the objective and audience targeted by his translation. He can therefore opt for: purely linguistic or sociolinguistic, interpretative, communicative, functional, literary theories depending on the text and the purpose of the translation.

One of the first theories appeared and proved its importance is the linguistic theory through what is known as Comparative Stylistics by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, who wrote an interesting manual entitled "Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais" in 1958 to help beginners in translation to distinguish the mechanisms of two different languages (French and English) and the procedures for transferring from one language to another without falling into mistakes or even having a negative impact on the genius of each of the two languages.

5. Comparative stylistics theory and its specific features:

Comparative stylistics aims to compare the stylistic elements of one language with those of another one. Stylistics is a field of study which explains how recognizing the differences between languages. In other words, "this systematic study offers students a better and deeper knowledge of the features that distinguish one language from another." (Brini, 2000, p. 394)

In the same context, Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet wrote "Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais" translated into English by Juan C. Sager and Marie-Josée Hamel (Comparative stylistics of French and English) in 1995. "This book is intended for people who have a sound knowledge of both cotemporary French and English. Its purpose is not to explain details of grammar or vocabulary but to examine how the constituent parts of a system function when they render ideas expressed in the other language." (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995, pp. 9-10) And despite its importance to highlight the mechanisms of both languages (French and English) and the working methods allowing the transfer from one to the other, the book does not claim to want "to provide a list of recipes whose application automatically leads to a mechanism for translation." (Ibid., p. 10)

The translator, in his process, tries to link between one text expressed in source linguistic system and another which will be made in target linguistic system. So he must, first, examine The SL text by evaluating the descriptive, affective and intellectual content of the units of translation, then reconstitute the situation of the message with take into account the stylistic effects. But it is a necessary to add that translator have to go over the text to ensure that none of the elements from the SL have been omitted before the end of the process. (See, Ibid., pp. 30-31)

6. Vinay and Darbelnet's translation procedures:

Vinay and Darbelnet's approach (Comparative stylistics) is based on two general translation strategies: Direct (literal) translation and Oblique (free) translation. The first one includes three procedures (Borrowing, Calque and Literal translation) and the second covers four procedures (Transposition, Modulation, Equivalence and Adaptation) so 7 procedures in total.

According to Vinay and Darbelnet, it may be possible to transpose literally the source language message into the target language when speaking about structural and metalinguistic parallelisms. But in most cases, we have to resort to complex methods because of structural and metalinguistic differences between some languages, which mean that certain stylistic effects cannot be transposed into the target language without free translation and changing the syntactic order of linguistic elements. (See, Ibid., p. 31).

Direct (Literal) translation	Direct (Literal) translation
<p>1. Borrowing: Transferring the SL words into the TL without formal or syntactic modification. Ex. J'ai payé ma Tortilla en dollars. I paid my Tortilla with dollars.</p>	<p>4. Transposition (Obligatory or optional): The replacement of one grammatical unit by another without any change in the meaning of an SL element by structures which have the same meaning but belong to different word classes. (Ibid., p. 36) Ex. Il rend délicate l'identification. It makes it delicate difficult to identify.</p>
<p>2. Calque: "A special kind of borrowing where the SL expression or structure is transferred in a literal translation". (V&D, 1995, p. 32) Ex. Banque pour le commerce et le développement. Bank for Commerce and Development.</p>	<p>5. Modulation (Obligatory or optional): A variation of the form of the message which results from the change in the point of view. Ex. Il est facile de démontrer... (Ibid., p. 37) It is not difficult to show....</p>
<p>3. Literal translation : The direct transfer of a SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text...(Ibid., p.34) Ex. J'ai laissé mes lunettes sur la table en bas. I left my spectacles on the table downstairs</p>	<p>6. Equivalence: The same situation which can be rendered by two texts using completely different stylistic and structural methods. Most of equivalences belong idioms, proverbs....(Ibid., p. 38) Ex. Il pleut des cordes. It is raining cats and dogs.</p>
	<p>7. Adaptation: A special sort of equivalence, or a situational equivalence. It concerns changing the cultural reference of a situation of the ST because of socio cultural differences between the SL and the TL communities. (Ibid., p. 38) Ex. En un clin d'œil. Before you could say Jack Robinson.</p>

Fig.2 Vinay & Darbelnet methods of translating

7. Comparative Stylistics and learners of translation:

To get an idea of the rate of use of Comparative stylistics, I analysed the translations produced by my 3rd year undergraduate students (numbering 45) during the 2021/2022 academic year from source texts of the following types: Legal, economic, scientific and literary from Arabic into French.

After analysing the content of the texts to be translated, each separately, and taking into account the terminology and context for each type of text, I gave the students the time they needed to translate the original text in question, while insisting on the steps to be followed before the process of transferring from Arabic to French in order to understand the content of the source text and thus manage to reconstitute it according to the specificities of the target language.

At the end of the translation of each text and during the correction of the students' work, I noticed the type of processes used by all the learners, which can be illustrated as follows:

Translation Techniques	Text Types			
	Legal	Scientific	Economic	Literary
Borrowing	15%	20%	10%	5%
Calque	5%	10%	10%	10%
Literal Translation	50%	60%	60%	40%
Transposition	10%	10%	10%	20%
Modulation	/	/		3%
Equivalence	20%	/	10%	20%
Adaptation	/	/		2%

Fig3. Types of Translation techniques used by the 3rd year undergraduate students (2021/2022)

Results:

We can conclude from this that most students used literal translation in all types of transferred texts, borrowings and calques accounting for not more than 20%, transposition accounting for 10% in scientific and pragmatic texts and 20% in literary texts. Equivalence represents 20% in legal and literary texts, and 10% in economic texts, but is not present in scientific texts. Adaptation accounts for 2% in literary texts, in attempt to adapt certain cultural situations to what is appropriate for the target language.

Thus, according to the above statistics, students, as learners, most often use literal translation, thinking that it is necessary to be faithful to the source texts, while sometimes opting for free translation according to the linguistic and cultural context of the translated text. Furthermore, they do not yet have an in-depth knowledge of the metalinguistic situations that arise in certain texts and which require other translation techniques such as functional equivalence, especially in so-called pragmatic legal and economic texts, given the differences between linguistic systems, legal and economic systems, and they sometimes opt for transposition and modulation according to the content and purpose of the translated text. That is why “students are challenged to respect the situationally of the texts from and into which they are translating—that is, to use functionalist considerations of how the text will be used, by whom, and any transculturation, changes of register, or additions that the translator may need to, or choose to, perform in response.” (Washbourne, 2012, p.5)

8. The importance of Comparative stylistics and its shortcomings:

Comparative stylistics was able to give a scientific aspect to the study of translation in the second half of the 20th century by presenting a theoretical model capable of explaining the process and result of translation. Vinay and Darbelnet's linguistic approach undoubtedly helped translators (especially beginners) by revealing the differences between linguistic systems and the methods used to facilitate the transition from one language to another.

In their linguistic approach, Vinay and Darbelnet distinguished between "cases where it is the languages themselves that set the rules for translating (in literal translation, it is only the words that change, not the syntax and meaning) and more complex situations, where it is the translator who has to introduce lexical, syntactic and cultural changes. Furthermore, the two theorists mentioned that for some translation units, it is possible to find a correspondence between the source language and the target language; for other units, it is necessary to make changes which reduce the differences between the two linguistic systems.” (Morini, 2007, pp.63-65, See Rakova, 2014, p. 102)

In their book (*Comparative stylistics...*), Vinay and Darbelnet assert that translation studies are linked to linguistics, but at the same time they complete their vision by including other disciplines such as stylistics, rhetoric or psychology, as they aim to “derive working methods of translation and beyond these methods discover the mental, social and cultural attitudes which inform them.” (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995, p. 10).

Vinay and Darbelnet's approach has certainly helped to improve the linguistic knowledge of translation students, but it is criticized for doing so only at the level of language (linguistic system), not at the level of discourse (written or oral text). In other words, their book focuses on the comparison of two languages as systems, rather than on texts written in these languages and coming from two different cultures. That is why "it appears that comparative stylistics, which is mainly interested in establishing correspondences and equivalences in two languages, does not go beyond the limit of language as a whole to reach the mobility of speech and usage." (Brini, 2000, p. 495) In this way, the translator is not limited to examining linguistic facts, idiomatic expressions and correspondences which can be the subject of a comparative study. He must take into account metalinguistic factors linked to the source text and not directly expressed when translating pragmatic and cultural contexts which require in-depth research and recourse to other disciplines making translation multidisciplinary.

To make up for the shortcomings of Vinay and Darbelnet's approach to the concept of the translation unit, Larose (See1989: 26) points out that units of one language are not translated into units of another language, but, as Jacobson (1963: 80) notes, the messages of one language into messages of another language. ... And although it is possible to solve many problems by the componential analysis at the lexical level, it is rather to semiotic units that we must turn.

In the same context, the Paris school criticized the units defined by Vinay and Darbelnet and proposed replacing them with "units of meaning" giving a dynamic translation by saying: The unit of meaning is the smallest element that makes it possible to establish equivalences in translation... It appears as the result of the junction of a linguistic knowledge and de-verbalized extra-linguistic knowledge. (See Seleskovitch and Lederer, 1994, p. 27)

On the other hand, Snell-Hornby (1995, p. 16) rejects the notion of equivalence by stating: "In the linguistically oriented views on translation theory up to the early 1970s the text was then seen as a linear sequence of units and translation was merely a transcoding process involving the substitution of a sequence of equivalent units."

9. Conclusion:

Comparative stylistics appears to be beneficial for translators, especially beginners, as it contributes to the contrastive study of linguistic systems in terms of lexicon, structure and style, helping to understand the linguistic mechanisms and appropriate methods for passing correctly from one language to another without affecting the genius of the target language. Despite the advantages of descriptive study of the linguistic elements that make up the source text in order to determine the grammatical functions and structural constructions of the source text, thus facilitating the translator's task in assimilating the initial data and perceiving the techniques to be implemented in order to be able to transmit the content expressed in the source language with the specificity of the target language.

However, comparative stylistics is not always the appropriate approach to use on its own, as the text to be translated may contain extralinguistic contexts that go beyond linguistics and require other disciplines capable of analysing factors related to semantics, sociology, psychology... This is why it is necessary to opt for more effective approaches: interpretative, sociolinguistic, functional and communicative, in an attempt to overcome the difficulties of translation.

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Acknowledgements:

We would like to sincerely thank YMER for the opportunity to publish our papers. We would also like to express our gratitude to my close colleagues at the Translation Institute of Algiers 2 University for their Help and encouragement. Our deepest gratitude also goes to the Editor-in-Chief, Mrs. Jiang Grava, who spares no effort to improve the performance of scientific research through her dedication and exceptional work within the journal.

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