

Meaning, mind and mediation:
Why the study of editing is a critical step
towards a holistic model of translation

Model building in empirical translation studies (TRICKLET workshop)

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Model building in empirical translation studies

Research on the workflow of translation

How can this research contribute to

- an empirically-based theory of translation, grounded in a theory of language?
- the working together of cognitive, social and professional aspects to form a model of translation?

→ towards a holistic, post-structuralist model of translation



Meaning

Common reasons for studying translation

Do we study translation to draw conclusions on

- workings of the human mind?
- meaning-making in society?



Meaning

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My main interest: the meaning of texts in society

- focus on meaning as it arises in and through
 - intersubjective meaning spaces (Bühler 1934)
 - shared intentionality (Tomasello 2008)
 - social practice (Teubert 2010)

Meaning and mind

A holistic, post-structuralist model of translation

- overcome essentialist binaries → bridge discipline
 - “*Psychology [...] disastrously borrow[ed] dualistic mentalism from Generative Linguistics. Behaviorism (for which the mind is supernumerary) and Formalism (for which the body is merely contingent) thus framed, in fearful symmetry, the disembodied Cartesian mind of Classical Cognitive Science.*” (Sinha 2010: 1268)
 - “[p]erhaps the major challenge facing Second Generation Cognitive Science is how to move, not just beyond Cartesian mind-body dualism, but also **beyond the dualism of individual and society** that has bedeviled cognitive psychology and cognitive science” (Sinha 2010: 1275–1276)
- adopt a holistic view of text

Meaning and mediation

a post-structuralist approach to text

- do (source) texts “have” meaning which is there for us to decipher?
 - is there “*‘something there’ to be understood*” (Steiner 1998: 312)?
 - cf the critique of “translation as transfer of meaning” in Hermans (2020: 231)
- or is meaning created in social practice as texts are negotiated in discourse?
 - recipients/readers take a significant role in the meaning of a text
 - postcolonial critique: “*Translation functions as a transparent presentation of something that already exists, although the ‘original’ is actually brought into being through translation*” (Niranjana 1992: 3)

Meaning and mediation

- Poynton's (1993: 14) criticism: systemic functional analysis “has virtually nothing to say about reception”: *“a framework for analysis of text will not lead readily to a theorisation of reception, which of necessity involves understanding the positionality of readers”*
- *“The acts of understanding a text repeatedly, in different local and temporal circumstances, in different individual readings, cannot, of course, be identical. [...] Discourse is historical, and meaning historically determined. The history of translation is a history of mistranslations, though under certain circumstances these mistranslations can be and may have been accepted as translations.”* (van den Broeck 1988: 277)

Meaning, mind and mediation

Suggestions for translation model

- overcome individual mind/brain vs society/relativism binary →
 - focus on the production and reception of texts rather than treating meaning as locked inside texts (Pennycook 2021: 111–112)
 - reception defines meaning → starts when the translation is read and negotiated among actors before publication (Bisiada 2018b, 2019)
- ↪ affects not only grammatical, but also discursive aspects/power relations

(1) Based on success in a previous role, a manager may believe **she** has a mandate. (Example taken from Bisiada (2018a: 45))

Angesichts des Erfolgs in einer früheren Position kann sich **eine Managerin** für besonders kompetent halten.

‘Based on the success in a previous position, a manager can believe **herself** to be especially competent.’

War **ein Manager** in einer früheren Position sehr erfolgreich, dann neigt **er** nun womöglich zu der Auffassung, **er** könne schalten und walten, wie **er** wolle.

‘If a manager was very successful in a previous position, **he** may tend to the belief that **he** can do as **he** likes.’



Meaning, mind and mediation

A theory of translation grounded in a theory of language

- we still generally consider the published text as the translation product
- meaning-making process in translation begins at the first negotiations once the texts enters a discourse
- need to differentiate not just the act of translating itself (process research, usually mind-focussed), but also discursal processes of translation
- “no linguistics that does not and cannot engage with central issues of feminist and poststructuralist theory concerning questions of subject production through discursive positioning can be taken seriously as a theory of language” (Poynton 1993: 2)

Discussion points

Is the dichotomy process vs product research warranted?

- dichotomy suggests that the process of translation leads to a product
- process research terms such as “verbalisation” and “think-aloud protocol” suggest unmediated access to the mind – but is access to the mind not mediated, just like access to translated text?
- are published texts really products, or are they processes, interrupted at a random moment?
- where do manuscripts stand? Are they part of the process that lead to the product, or are they products themselves?

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