

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACADEMIC LITERACY IN ANALYSING TEXTS FOR TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

Academic literacy has long been discussed throughout the scientific disciplines. Such discussions have partly resulted in a sort of awareness in people's mind concerning how we implement it in the areas of scientific disciplines we deal with. In the translation domain, we question how much the significance of such stuff is for the benefit of comprehensively analyzing text for inter-language rendering. This paper intends to provide an answer to such question. It deals with the use of relevant literacy to analyze any source text as a basis to produce a target text through transfer of meaning and reconstruction of language fulfilling the aspects of readability, accuracy, and naturalness.

Keywords: academic literacy, text analysis, translation

INTRODUCTION

Translation involves three ways of knowing texts: understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge. These are closely related to the notion of academic literacy practices which covers reading and writing within disciplines constituting central processes through which translators strive to understand texts and develop knowledge as a basis to understand the texts for rendering purposes. An approach to literacy takes account of cultural and contextual components of writing and reading practices, and this in turn has important implications for an understanding of translation tasks. Educational research into translation has tended to concentrate on ways in which practitioners can be helped to adapt their practices from this perspective. In order to understand the

nature of translation practices, it is important to investigate the understandings of both the translation process and literacy practices, without making prior assumptions as to which practices are either appropriate or effective.

It is significantly important to develop a more complex analysis of what it means to become academically literate as one of the starting point to translation practices. Meanings are contested amongst the different parties involved. Viewing literacy from a cultural and social practice and approaching meanings as contested can provide insights into the nature of academic literacy and academic learning because through researching these differing expectations and interpretations of academic literacy and translation we hope to shed light on failure well as success and

progression in translation practices covering three major phases, i.e. analysis of a source text, transfer of meaning, and restructuring or reconstructing the text in the target language.

This paper, however, does not discuss the three phases of translation; it merely intends to explore the significance of academic literacy to understand subject matter by answering the question: How academic literacy operates in analyzing the source texts for translation purposes.

TRANSLATION PROCESS

A careful analysis in the process of translating, especially in the case of source and receptor languages having quite different grammatical and semantic

structures such as the case of English and Indonesian, has shown that, instead of going directly from one set of surface structures to another, the translator actually goes through a process of analyzing the source text, transferring message to the target language, and restructuring the text in the target language. Through this process, the translator first analyses the message of the source language into its simplest and structurally clearest forms, transfers it at this level, and then restructures it to the level in the receptor language, which is most appropriate for the target audience. Such a set of related procedures can be represented diagrammatically as follows.

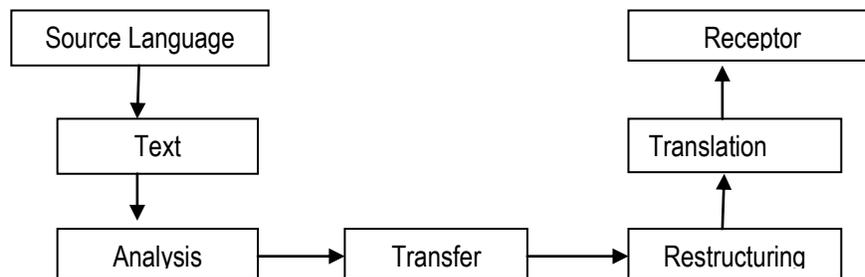


Figure 1 Translation Process (Source: Nida and Taber, 1969).

In this seemingly simple process, the 'analysis' phase begins with discovering the so-called 'kernels', i.e. basic structural elements to which syntactically more elaborate surface structures of a language can be reduced.

According to Nida and Taber, kernel analysis is a crucial step in the process of

moving from a source text to a target one. This is in line with the essentially universalist hypothesis to which Nida subscribes: languages 'agree far more on the level of the kernels than on the level of the more elaborate structures' (Nida and Taber 1969:39).

Nida and Taber stated that kernels consist of combinations of items from four basic semantic categories: object words (nouns referring to physical objects including human beings); event words (actions often represented by verbs); abstracts (qualities and quantities, including adjectives); relational (including linking devices, gender markers).

Kernel sentences are derived from the actual source sentence by means of a variety of techniques including, most importantly, back-transformation. In explicating grammatical relationships, ST surface structures are 'paraphrased' into 'formulae' capturing the way in which elements from the various categories listed above are combined (Nida 1969:485). Thus, the surface structure of the utterance *will of God* may be back-transformed into a formula such as B (object, *God*) performs A (event, *wills*).

Transfer is the stage 'in which the analyzed material is transferred in the mind of the translator from the source language (A) to the target language (B)' (Nida and Taber 1969:33). It is important to remember that, during the phase of 'transfer', kernels are not treated in isolation since they would already be marked temporally, spatially and logically. But they would still be raw material which the translator, in the light of his or her knowledge of target language structure, must now modify in preparation for restructuring (the stage of putting pen to paper, as it were). A source language word

may have to be expanded into several target language words, or alternatively, a source language phrase re-moulded into a single target language word. Along similar lines, structural differences between source language and target language are reconciled at the sound, word, sentence or even discourse level. It is probably here that 'strategy' (or the translator's 'game plan') is worked out, and decisions regarding such matters as register and genre are initially taken. Thus, rather than a simple replacement exercise of actual source language elements with their most literal target language counterparts, 'transfer' is a dynamic process of 'reconfiguration' in the target language of sets of source language semantic and structural components.

However, the analysis of a text in the source language is not limited to a study of the syntactic relationships between linguistic units or to the denotative (or referential) meanings of these same units but also treat the emotive (or connotative) values of the formal structure of the communication, necessitating the translator to understand the subject matter contained in the text under translation including linguistic and socio-cultural aspects, besides mastering competence in using the source language, competence in the target language. It is this fact which may have led European Code of Ethics for Literary Translators from CEATL to include them in its verses stating that (1) anyone practicing the profession of Translator

confirms that they have a very sound knowledge of the language from which s/he translates (the source language), and of the language into which s/he is working (the target language). The target language should be their mother tongue, or a language in which they have mother-tongue competence, as any writer must master the language in which s/he writes; and (2) the translator must be aware of his/her limitations and refrain from translating material which is outside his/her scope or the sphere of knowledge required, implying that a translator should equip him/herself with adequate knowledge about the text which (s)he intends to translate to his/her mother tongue. (Hatim and Munday 2004:305). In other words, a professional translator should equip him/herself with competence in both the source and the target language and the so-called academic literacy, i.e. competence in reading and understanding text in the source language, as well as capability in reproducing such text in the target language fulfilling the requirements of accuracy, naturalness, and readability.

ACADEMIC LITERACY

Literacy is basically defined as (1) the ability to read and write; (2) knowledge of a particular subject, or a particular type of knowledge (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*). This definition only covers a very basic level of literacy, i.e. the so-called basic and functional levels of

literacy. If an adjective 'academic' is put to modify such a word forming the term 'academic literacy', then, it refers to much broader scope of literacy.

The term academic literacy may refer to the critical thinking, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills learned within the academic society. It allows an individual to effectively establish communication within all areas of his/her academic environment. To become academically literate, a person has to familiarize himself with the levels of communication that exist.

In order to define and understand the term academic literacy, it must be broken into segments since it has an array of sectors that must first be met to achieve it. For instance, in order to become academically literate one has to become familiar with academic discourse, i.e. a type of writing and reading skills used in specific fields using certain terminology. This requires a type of critical thinking and writing strategies that are used to help people communicate effectively (<http://www.exampleessays.com/viewpaper/14852.html>)

Academic literacy has a great impact over how a person expresses and presents themselves in a scholastic environment. The tools to effectively read, write and critically think are skills that not only help a person in the scholastic environment, but also in personal discovery. Through positive experiences with academic literacy, people do not only learn to

improve their writing and other critical skills, but they also apply this toward learning about themselves and becoming a more confident person in everything they do. (<http://www.directessays.com/view/paper/85152.html>)

Learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge. Academic literacy practices—reading and writing within disciplines—constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study. A practices approach to literacy takes account of the cultural and contextual component of writing and reading practices, and this in turn has important implications for an understanding of student learning. (Lea and Street)

Academic literacy can thus be defined as the ability to read, write, understand, analyze, interpret, create and communicate in a formal scholarly context. It involves translators' capability of critical/independent thought, of working alone and knowing how to acknowledge the work of others. Because academic literacy covers all elements of academic conducts – reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical thinking, use of technology, and habits of mind that foster academic success, the habits of mind expected of translators—their curiosity, their daring, their participation in intellectual discussions—are predicated upon their ability to convey their ideas

clearly and to listen and respond to divergent views respectfully.

Academic Literacy in Text Analysis

As stated above, a professional translator should equip him/herself with competence in both the source and the target language and the so-called academic literacy, i.e. competence in reading and understanding text in the source language in order to be able to transfer the message contained in the text and restructure it in the target language resulting in written text that is accurate, natural, and readable. The significance of academic literacy in this case can then be viewed from three inseparable perspectives, i.e. significance in reading a source text, rewriting the text in the target language, and critical thinking of relevant knowledge contained in the texts.

Significance of Academic Literacy in Reading

In reading a source text, the mastery of academic literacy functions to maximally minimize lack of analytical reading skills that may contribute to lack of success in translation. Besides, such competence is also applicable to enhance the translators' comprehension of academic and workplace texts under the translation project, and to enrich his/her reading competence not formally taught beyond language department. Furthermore, competence in academic literacy is also significant for the effort of developing the translators need to effective critical reading

strategies, and maximizing the use of the strategies to think critically, to argue, to compare, to own an idea, and to remember, all of which are necessary bases to understand texts in the source language.

Significance of Academic Literacy in (Re)writing

In (re)writing, the importance of academic literacy is seen in analyzing information or arguments and synthesizing information from several sources. Besides that, academic literacy is also useful as a basis in producing target texts relatively free of language errors. This in turns leads to the effort of expressing meanings in the target language clearly, accurately, as well as naturally. Academic literacy is therefore also significant as the basis for completing complex translation tasks across the disciplines, and considering and reconsidering additional points or arguments, to reshape and reconstruct translation texts.

Significance of Academic Literacy in Critical Thinking

Academic literacy has been instrumental in leading us to be familiar with some technological elements, demonstrating the crucial ability to evaluate online resources critically. For this purpose we need to form questioning habits of reading, especially material found on the internet where we must evaluate materials for clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness.

Besides that, academic literacy may become one of the bases to master technological skills itself. So, it is sensible for a translator to cope with basic technological skills that include word processing, e-mail use, and the fundamentals of web-based research, all for the sake of analyzing text for translation.

EXAMPLES

In excerpt (1) from Bronte, the concept of meaning in the expression 'like a Turk' can only be understood by observing how a Turk habitually sits cross-legged, without which such expression does not provide any referential meaning: how would one sit in such manner? Is it the same as the way a Javanese sits?

(1) I sat cross-legged, **like a Turk** (Bronte)

In excerpt (2), which was taken from Tolstoy, the year '1805' can only be understood by means of exploring what really happened during that period of time. Imagination about what Anna Pavlovna Scherer is like along with the ways in which her environment treated her as a lady, and the like, can only be materialized by means of disclosing the realities taking place in the particular period of time in Russian history as it was told by Tolstoy, the story teller and the writer.

(2) It was in July, **1805**, and the speaker was the well-known Anna Pavlovna Scherer, maid of honor and favorite of the Empress Marya Fedorovna. (Tolstoy).

The referential meaning in the relationships between Milan and Francesco Sforza on the one hand and between kingdom of Naples and the King of Spain on the other in Excerpt (3) can only be imagined by uncovering the referents of such expressions in reality be it fictional or historical.

(3) The new are either entirely new, as was **Milan to Francesco Sforza**, or they are, as it were, members annexed to the hereditary state of the prince who has acquired them, as was the **kingdom of Naples to that of the King of Spain**. (Machiavelli)

In excerpts (4 – 6) which had been quoted from Morris (1839), expressions in French were inserted to the English text forming code-switching between the two languages. Besides, the expressions in English itself were presented in a sort of nonstandard or casual language causing common readers find it hard to understand their intended meaning. In excerpt (4) the French expressions *Pardonnez-moi, monsieur, excusez-moi, and votre bureau* were inserted to the common expressions in English. In excerpt (5) such words as *ver, ting, wid, de, vid, and vatare* were used to substitute more common expressions causing the text to become relatively strange. In excerpt (6) uncommon expressions in English were used alternately with French expressions.

(4) "Pardonnez-moi, monsieur," said Poopoo, as the auctioneer descended his pedestal, "you shall excusez-moi, if

I shall go to votre bureau, your counting-house,

- (5) *ver quick to make every ting sure wid respec to de lot vid de valuarble vatare privelege.*
- (6) Von leetle bird in de hand he **vorth** two in **de** tree, **c'est vrai**—eh?" (Morris)

In excerpt (7) from Hoban (1998), the phrase 'naming day', for instance, is an immediate puzzle, because it is not a phrase clearly related to any anniversary. The phrase 'to gone' is another puzzle. The words 'kilt', 'wyld', 'pably', and 'ben', which can be associated with the common words 'killed', 'wild', 'probably', and 'been' respectively, may also take the translator literacy to understand what they stand for and why Hoban, the writer, employed such words in his story.

- (7) On my **naming day** when I come 12 I to gone front spear and **kilt a wyld** boar he **parbly ben** the **las wyld** pig on the Bundle Downs any how there hadn't ben none for a long time **befor** him nor I aint looking to see none **agen**. (Hoban)

Examining the excerpts presented above, it can be stated that it not only takes linguistic expertise including that of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in English to analyze such texts but also vast understanding of uncommon expressions in English as the core or source language, and expressions in another language used side by side with the core language. In

other words, analyzing such texts, a translator needs to equip him/herself with adequate level of academic literacy enabling him/her to internalize messages intended to be conveyed to its readers through varieties of expressions.

CONCLUSION

A careful analysis in the process of translating has shown that instead of going directly from one set of surface structures to another, a translator actually goes through a process of analyzing the source text, transferring message to the target language, and restructuring the text in the target language. In this process, the 'analysis' phase begins with discovering basic structural elements to which syntactically more elaborate surface structures of a language can be reduced.

The term academic literacy refers to critical thinking, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. In practice, this term involves ways of knowing, understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge. Academic literacy practices constitute central processes through which translators deal with new subjects and develop their competence in new areas of knowledge. A professional translator should equip him/herself with such competence in both the source and the target language and academic literacy in the source language in order to be able to transfer messages contained in the text and restructure it in the target language resulting in written text that is accurate,

natural, and readable. The significance of academic literacy can then be viewed from three inseparable perspectives, i.e. significance in reading a source text, rewriting the text in the target language, and critical thinking of relevant knowledge contained in the texts. Analyzing such texts, a translator needs to equip him/herself with adequate level of academic literacy enabling him/her to internalize messages intended to be conveyed to its readers through varieties of expressions.

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