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The Impact of Skopos on Syntactic Features of the Target Text

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in English Translation Studies

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To my father and mother,

In his loving memory

and for her unwavering support and companionship

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Abstract

The present study is an experimental case study which investigates the impacts, if any, of skopos on syntactic features of the target text.

Two test groups each consisting of 10 MA students translated a set of sentences selected from advertising texts in the operative and informative mode. The resulting target texts were then statistically analyzed in terms of the number of words, phrases, simple and complex sentences, showing no notable differences between the renditions of the two groups.

The thesis concludes that the skopos does not affect the syntactic features of the target text

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction:

Skopos theory is an approach to translation which was developed in Germany in the late 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer in his seminal work, *Ein Rahmen für eine allgemeine Translationstheorie* (Vermeer 1978), and represents a shift away from the mostly linguistics-based translation theories of the time towards a more functionally and socioculturally oriented concept of translation.

"Vermeer calls his theory *Skopostheorie*, a theory of purposeful action. In Vermeer's approach, translation is a form of translational action based on a source text, which may consist of verbal and/or non-verbal elements (illustrations, plans, tables, etc.)" (Nord 2001:11)

According to Munday, Skopos theory focuses on the purpose of a translation, which determines the translation methods and strategies that are to be employed in order to produce a functionally adequate result (the Target Text), which Vermeer calls the *Translatum*; therefore the translator should know why an ST is to be translated and what the function of the TT will be. (Munday 2001)

1.2. Significance of the study:

"Vermeer considers translation (including interpreting) to be a type of transfer where communicative verbal and non-verbal signs are transferred from one language into another". (Nord 2001:11)

Translation is viewed not as a process of transcoding, but as a specific form of human action. Like any other human action, translation has a purpose, and the word *skopos* is used as a technical term meaning the purpose of a translation.

The present study was the first experimental case study in Iran which focused on the Skopos theory ==and which== can pave the way for further researches based on functional theories in translation studies.

The results of this study will help develop a new vision for the students of translation studies, providing a more functional approach and a tangible case-study as opposed to the less-applicable passive mindset that usually accompanies the presentation of such theories.

1.3. Statement of the Problem:

 In translating academic papers, instruction, tourist guides, contracts, etc, contextual factors surrounding the translation can not be ignored. These factors include the following:

- The culture of the source language society

- The culture of the target language society

- The function which the text is to perform in the culture of those readers

I have always been interested in finding out whether skopos could be effective with all genres especially advertising. The present study may provide the reader with an answer in this regard since it intended to examine the impact of skopos or purpose of the translation, if any, on the syntactic features of the target text, which are the number of phrases and sentences including simple and complex sentences and on a specific textual feature, namely the number of words.

1.4. Research Question:

The present study was intended to answer the following question:

1. Does skopos affect the syntactic features of the target text which are the number of phrases and sentences including simple and complex sentences and on a specific textual feature, namely the number of words?

1.5. Research Hypothesis:

The hypothesis of the present research was as follows:

- The *Skopos* or purpose of the translation does not significantly affect the syntactic features of the target text and the number of words.

1.6. Definition of Key Terms:

1. Skopos: "is a Greek word for 'aim' or 'purpose' and was introduced into translation theory in the 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer as a technical term for the purpose of translation and of the action of translating".(Munday 2004:78)

2. Functional approach: "…a kind of cover term for the research of scholars who argue that the purpose of the TT is the most important criterion in any translation". (Schäffner 1996:2)

3. Text types: as defined by Reiss, texts can be divided into 4 categories: Content-focused texts (informative), Form-focused texts (expressive), Appeal-focused texts(operative) and audio medial texts. (Munday 2004)

4. Types of sentences in English:

1. *Simple sentence*: contains one full subject and predicate. Takes the form of:

- **A statement**   He lives in Paris.

- **A question**   How old are you?

- **A request**   Please close the door.

- **An exclamation**   What a terrible temper she has!

2. *Compound sentence*: contains two or more sentences joined into one by:

- **Punctuation alone**

The weather was very bad; all classes were cancelled.

- **Punctuation and a conjunctive adverb**

The weather was very bad; therefore all classes were cancelled.

- **A coordinate conjunction (and, or, but, yet, so, for)**

The weather was very bad, so all classes were cancelled.

When such sentences are joined coordinately, they are each called independent clauses.

3. *Complex sentence*: contains one or more dependent (or subordinate) clauses. A dependent clause contains a full subject and predicate beginning with a word that attaches the clause to an independent clause (called the main clause).

- **Adverbial clause**

All classes were cancelled because the weather was bad.

- **Adjective clause**

Children who are under twelve years must be accompanied by the parents.

- **Noun clause**

I can't understand why you did such a thing.

4. Compound-complex sentence: contains two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

All classes were cancelled because the weather was bad, and students were told to listen to the radio to find out when classes would begin again. (Marcella Frank 1972:1)

5. Types of sentences in Farsi:

1. Simple sentence: contains one subject and one verb and also it has the final pause at the end of it.

علی رفت.

2. Complex sentence: contains more than one subject or verb and contains some clauses.

(Translated from Farshidvard (2003)   فریدون آمد و فرهاد رفت.

6. Word: in the present study the words were counted in Farsi based on their meaning e.g.

"پخته خواهد شد" is considered as one word in Farsi.

1.7. Limitations of the Study:

Limitations of the present study were as follows:

1. Number of subjects: the present study was a case study due to the number of subjects (20). With the participation of more subjects, this study could have turned into a full-fledged experimental research.
2. Genre of the source text was advertising which made the research even more difficult since we don't have well-defined instructions regarding translating advertising texts in the Persian language.
3. The exclusion of other text types defined by Reiss from the study, i.e. form-focused and audio-medial texts.

Chapter 2

Review of the

Literature

Historical overview

2.1. Introduction

Munday claims that the 1970s and 1980s saw a shift from the statistic linguistic approaches to translation and the emergence of a functionalist and communicative view to the analysis of translation. (Munday 2004)

Functional approaches to translation were not invented in the twentieth century. Throughout history translators – mainly literary or Bible translators – observed that different situations call for different renderings. However, 'translation proper' is frequently associated with word-for-word fidelity to the source text, even though the result may not be considered appropriate for the intended purpose. Note Cicero's account of the dilemma:"If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator"."(De optimo genere oratorum v.14, cf. Nord 2001:4)

2.2. Linguistic Approaches to Translation

In a similar vein to Cicero, Eugene A. Nida (1964) distinguishes between formal and dynamic equivalence in translation.' Formal equivalence' refers to a faithful reproduction of source-text form elements while 'dynamic equivalence' denotes equivalence of extralinguistic communicative effect.

In 'A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation of Theories of Translation' (1976:64), Nida places special emphasis on the purpose of translation, on the roles of both the translator and the receivers, and on the cultural implications of the translation process:

"When the question of the superiority of one translation over another is raised, the answer should be looked for in the answer to another question,' Best for whom?'. The relative adequacy of different translations of the same text can only be determined in terms of the extent to which each translation successfully fulfills the purpose for which it was intended." (cf. Nord 2001:5)

Nida calls his approach 'sociolinguistic'. However when trying to apply it to translation in general, he suggests a three-stage model of the translation process. In this model, source-text surface elements (grammar, meaning,

connotations) are analyzed as linguistic kernel or near- kernel structures that can be transferred to the target language and restructured to form target-language surface elements. This basically linguistic approach, whose similarity with Noam Chomsky's theory of syntax and generative grammar (1957,1965) is not accidental, had more influence on the development of translation theory in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s than did the idea of dynamic equivalence.

Two basic definitions of translation which were derived from linguistic approaches are as follows:

"The replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL)." (Catford 1965:20 cf. Nord, 2001:6)

"Translating consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message." (Nida & Taber 1969:12 cf.ibid:7)

These approaches basically saw translating as a code-switching operation. With the more pragmatic reorientation at the beginning of the 1970s, the focus shifted from the word or phrase to the text as a unit of translation, but the fundamental linguistic trend was not broken. Equivalence as a basic

concept or even constituent of translation was never really questioned. (ibid:7)

Summing up the theorizing of translation over three centuries, Kelly states: "A translator molds his image of translation by the function he assigns to language; from function, one extrapolates to nature. Thus those who translate merely for objective information have defined translation differently from those for whom the source text has a life of its own." (Kelly 1979:4, cf. ibid: 8)

This may be the reason why some translation scholars working in training institutions started to give functionalist approaches priority over equivalence-based approaches.

2.3. Functionalist Approaches to Translation

Schäffner calls the functionalist approach "…a kind of cover term for the research of scholars who argue that the purpose of the TT is the most important criterion in any translation". (Schäffner 1998:2) Functionalism is a major shift from 'linguistic equivalence' to 'functional appropriateness'. From the perspective of functional approaches to translation (particularly, under the