

Interdisciplinarity: A Challenge in the Didactics of Translation ?

تعدد التخصصات: تحدٍ في تعليمية الترجمة؟

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Abstract: This paper is a reflection on the place of Translation in the Communication field and among other related academic disciplines in the Social, Human and even Cognitive Sciences. It also hints on eventual changes and new approaches in the didactics of translation in our Institute. So far translation has been taught separately; why not integrate it to relevant academic disciplines? Interdisciplinarity could be the key to a new approach, and innovative didactical methods within the framework of Translation Studies. It should act as a challenge to cross the conventional “borders” of academic disciplines and might help translation teachers in their difficult communicative task, as well as pave the way for scholars and students to understand the complexity of translation. Integrating the theoretical framework of some disciplines to the empirical data of translation, could be useful for translation trainers to improve their students’ competence and skills.

Keywords: Interdisciplinarity; communication; translation; academic disciplines ; challenge ; didactics

ملخص: نتناول في هذا المقال مكانة الترجمة في مجال الاتصال وبين التخصصات الأكاديمية الأخرى ذات الصلة المتمثلة في العلوم الاجتماعية والإنسانية وحتى المعرفية. كما نشير إلى تغييرات محتملة وأساليب جديدة في تعليم الترجمة في معهدنا. إذ يتم تدريس الترجمة حتى الآن بشكل مستقل عن العلوم الأخرى؛ فلماذا لا يتم دمجها في التخصصات الأكاديمية ذات الصلة؟ وقد يكون تعدد التخصصات هو المفتاح لمقاربة جديدة ومناهج تعليمية مبتكرة في إطار دراسات الترجمة. ويجب أن يكون بمثابة تحدٍ لعبور "الحدود" التقليدية للتخصصات الأكاديمية؛ كما يمكن أن يساعد معلمي الترجمة في مهمتهم التواصلية الصعبة، بالإضافة إلى تمهيد الطريق لأهل الاختصاص والطلبة لفهم مدى تعقيد الترجمة. وقد يكون دمج الإطار النظري لبعض التخصصات في الإطار التطبيقي للترجمة مفيداً لمدرسي الترجمة لتحسين كفاءة الطلبة ومهاراتهم.

كلمات مفتاحية: تعدد التخصصات؛ الاتصال؛ الترجمة؛ التخصصات الأكاديمية؛ تحدٍ تعليمية

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1. INTRODUCTION In our era of economic and cultural globalization, Communication stands out as the pivot in such interactions. Oral as well as written Translation, being an act of communication, par excellence, plays a significant and major role in the concert of human daily activities. Translation studies have been changing and adapting in order to fit in the multicultural environment we live in. If translation is so closely connected to communication studies and other annexed academic disciplines of the Social and Human Sciences, why should it be taught separately?

This paper is a reflection on the place of translation in Communication Studies as well as among other related academic disciplines of the Social, Human and even Cognitive and Neuro-Sciences in and on its interdisciplinary nature. The aim is an attempt to hint for eventual changes and new approaches in the didactics of translation in our Institute, such as the Interdisciplinary approach. The main target and motivation is a strong willingness to re-structure our courses and schedules as teachers and in the same time improve our students' skills and competences.

2. Communication and Translation

2.1 Communication

Never before as in this era of constant economic and cultural globalization, has the word of 'communication' been so significant and so commonly used. More than just a word or a concept, Communication is an academic discipline of the Human and Social Sciences which we could not define as a unified discipline. Not only is it a skill and a didactic tool for transmitting knowledge but it is also a field of study and research across many disciplines, the processes of which operate simultaneously at many levels: cultural, social, psychological and even neurological.

The study of communication encompasses any and all forms of communications. No matter what discipline we are dealing with, communication skills will be a component of our success as trainers.

2.2 Micro-communication versus macro-communication

Just like the distinction commonly made in the field of Economics between Macro and Micro-Economics, we could make the same distinction between Macro-Communication, which speaks to a general, large-scale overview

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of communication factors and Micro-Communication, which refers more to an examination of single factors relating communication matters. Macro-communication looks at the act of interaction from a broad perspective. One entity communicates with another. Whether the act of communicating has been performed correctly or not, is another matter, of lesser importance to us; perhaps more important to communication experts.

As for Micro-Communication, it involves individuals interacting with others within the same entity. As teachers or just in our daily life we use micro-communication without realizing it: mother with child, teacher with student, manager with staff, etc. We exchange information, express feelings, try to persuade or give orders, and so on. It's a daily human need.

The problematic issues engendered by communications are so important that they constitute an essential phenomenon at a social level: without communications, there could not be a society, nor work teams, family life nor personal improvement.

2.3. Translation, a human act of Communication

In Didactics, we are concerned by micro-communication. What is important in this type of communication is the obvious question of whether the performance of communication was effective and successful. Beyond that, the matter of specific strategies used becomes an important point of focus.

Communication is an academic social science that blends many interrelated disciplines in the arts, humanities, political sciences, anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc. Education is one of the most common fields of communication ; teachers being essentially communicators.

Translating, including interpreting is a human act of communication 'par excellence', with all its complexity, and teaching translation is a double act of communication.

Translation is the point of contact, the confrontation between not only two different languages but also two cultures, two different worlds, particular and unique. It consists of understanding first, then explaining, transmitting, communicating a decoded, clear and coherent message.

Understanding and speaking a foreign language is not only a linguistic task but also a cultural one. A good translator is someone who, in addition to his linguistic skills and competence, and after having understood and investigated into the depth

and complexity of other cultures, delivers a coherent message based on a social context. A good translator is someone who succeeds in realizing the process of conveying a message from a foreign universe into the mental universe of the target language, taking into consideration all its social, cultural, religious, political, economic parameters. Hence, translating requires not only bilingual persons but also intercultural and transcultural bilinguals.

Obviously, this is a complex and not an easy task indeed. As with any other means of communication, the translator may come across disturbances, 'non-translatability', loyalty, or a difficulty of transmitting the message because of various pronunciations and accents, in conference interpreting for instance; but this is another debate. Faithfulness in translation requires from the translator not to translate outside his own area of competence. One may be a good translator of, let us say, poetry or literature but not have a clue on medical or law texts. Hence, the necessity for an interdisciplinary initiative in translation.

3. Interdisciplinarity and Translation

Considering that translation is by definition an act of communication and that our task as translation trainers has a communicative target, why wouldn't we give this discipline a more significant place in communications studies and integrate it to different teaching units?

3.1 Review of some well known academic institutions using an interdisciplinary approach in Translation Didactics

If we have a quick look at some universities abroad, we can notice that translation studies are intertwined with communication studies and even language and intercultural studies. To mention but a few:

At the University McGill in Montreal, the department of Translation Studies includes Language and Intercultural Communication.

At Notre Dame Catholic University in Lebanon, the Department of English and Translation includes a communication skills program.

At Graz University in Austria, the Institute of Translation Studies trains for a B.A in Transcultural Communication that includes language and translation classes, culture and civilization, and an introduction to different approaches in Translation studies.

At l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, the Faculty of Arts provides a course in Translation and Communication.

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The well classified Ghent University has a Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication.

All these universities associate translation to the other annexed disciplines such as Communication, Language and Cultural Studies.

Indeed, the teaching of translation should not be partitioned and cut off from other related disciplines. It requires the contribution of not only psycholinguists, sociolinguists, language teachers, but also experts in communication, language behavior and other disciplines of the Human and Social Sciences and even cognitive and neuro scientists

3.2 What is Interdisciplinarity?

Interdisciplinarity has been a great ‘buzz-word’ in academia for perhaps a generation and still is up to the second decade of the twenty-first century. What is the meaning of this word then?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Interdisciplinarity is the quality or fact of involving or drawing on two or more branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinary studies do not refer to a specific topic of study. They involve the combination of two or more academic disciplines or fields of study into one activity. It draws knowledge, inspiration from several fields like Human, Neuro-Cognitive Sciences, from Cultural, Social, Ethnic, Gender, Media Studies etc . What gets combined and integrated are disciplinary insights or concepts, not the disciplines themselves. The approach is against conventional approaches. It is a world which crosses the boundaries between academic disciplines and schools of thought.

3.3 History of the concept

The concept of Interdisciplinarity was born in the mid-1920s in New York, having been spread by the Social Sciences Research Council everywhere since then. The American pioneer School for Social Research called for the integration of Social Sciences and the related arts, industry and public welfare, stressing the “inter-relation”, “inter-communication”, “inter-penetration” of the various disciplines.

In fact, as early as 1912, the National Research Council in Washington had paved the way by proposing to foster interest in "subjects lying between the old-established divisions of Science" and in 1914, it insisted on "the inter-relationship of Sciences." In the 1920s and 30s, the most popular terms at the National

Research Council were "new fields," "overlapping projects," "interrelated research," etc.

By mid-century, the word 'Interdisciplinarity' was common coin in the Social Sciences in the New World. A decade later, it reached France through its political sciences circles first, then, a decade later, at the barricades of May 1968:

'Pluridiscipliné et Interdisciplinarité : deux termes barbares, mêmes s'ils sont d'actualité' .(Le Figaro 8 Sept. 1970)

In the 1970s the concept of Interdisciplinarity spread even in non-academic fields such as interior designing which pointed out the distinction to be made between multi-disciplinary work and inter-disciplinary work.

3.4. Interdisciplinarity and the Didactics of Translation

The concept of Interdisciplinarity obviously reached Education where it was defined as a research or an activity that required a day-to-day interaction between persons from different disciplines and the interchange in an interactive mode of samples, ideas, and results. If we are to have interdisciplinary achievement, we must have interdisciplinary language, keeping in mind that some disciplines seem to be more interdisciplinary than others. With globalization, some major social issues are bound to be interdisciplinary, calling for interdisciplinary solutions

We are now almost in the third decade of the twenty-first century, and the concept of Interdisciplinarity is still news. It is becoming even more significant with the boom of globalization and the constant fast progress of technology.

To conclude on the close relation between Interdisciplinarity and the didactics of translation, one could say that the interdisciplinary research and approach has become essential and of great interest to Translation Studies. Interdisciplinarity might be the key to new approaches, new findings and innovative didactical methods within the framework of Translation Studies, for example by taking into consideration Neuro and Cognitive Sciences models and concepts as regards the problematics of interpretation training.

Interdisciplinarity is striving to create new knowledge by integrating elements from different disciplines, methods, models, concepts. Therefore it should act as a challenge to cross the conventional "borders" of academic disciplines in order to help the teachers of translation and interpreting, in particular, in their difficult task and consequently, help scholars and students understand the complex phenomenon of translation. Finally, as Nash Smith put it: "Interdisciplinarity

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should be a collaboration of scholars attempting to widen boundaries, not eliminate them”

4. Recommendations for improving the didactics of translation in our Institute

1. The revival of pedagogical committees
2. The teaching of translation should not be partitioned as it has always been, but combined with other related disciplines such as languages and linguistics, for a start. There should be a fluidity of knowledge and tools between the subjects.
3. The Introduction of disciplines from the Social and Human Sciences such as psychology, sociology, communication etc.
4. The introduction of cultural studies along with the language courses and their integration to translation courses
5. Give more importance to the course of “civilization”. As a matter of fact, over the past years, the subject of civilization, which used to be included in Master programs had been cancelled; then integrated in the graduation schedules for just one academic year, then reduced to one semester only in the first graduation year, a semester which in fact corresponds to one term. Moreover, the teaching hours were limited to 1.30 hour per week! Finally, this discipline has been recently cancelled.
6. Introduce disciplines like Law, Politics, Economics, Psychology, Ethnology, Sociology and combine them with translation, no matter in which language.
7. Creation of team works with colleagues from the faculties of Communication and Information, Sociology, Psychology, Law, Political Sciences, Economics and with colleagues from various language departments.

Couldn't we throw away years of conventional teaching, have the courage to re-think our teaching and eventually re-structure it? The initiative is not impossible, provided we all work hand in hand within regular pedagogical committees.

4. Conclusion

So far, translation has been taught as a separate discipline, isolated from other close and relevant academic disciplines of the Human, Social and even Neuro-Sciences; hence the necessity for Interdisciplinarity in the didactics of translation. A collaboration and an interactive approach between teachers of different annexed disciplines would widen the conventional “boundaries” of fields of study, and might

help our students understand the complexity of translation. It might also help us in our communicative task as translation trainers to integrate the knowledge, skills, ideas, concepts, models and the theoretical framework of such disciplines to the empirical data of translation, aiming at a more proficient structuring of our courses and hopefully, at improving our students' competence and skills.

Could Interdisciplinarity act as a didactic challenge to improve our students' performance(s) then? We would answer this question positively and optimistically, provided we are brave enough, humble and willing to change our conventional teaching, up-date it and most of all re-structure the graduation and post graduation schedules.

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