

Is the Translator a Source, a Medium or a Receiver in the Communication Process?

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Abstract

Though theorists do acknowledge that translation is a communication process, it seems still difficult to unarguably locate the translator in a classical communication model. Attempts at locating the translator in this process has resulted in various (conflicting) postulations. For a good number of theorists, the translator plays the role of a sender for two principal reasons: first, s/he is the “creator” of a new – though non-autonomous – message and second, s/he is often believed to have his/her own public (the receivers in the target language). This public is totally different from that of the original author. On the other hand, a counter school of thought considers the translator to be a kind of medium as s/he operates at an intermediary position between the original author and the receiver. This paper argues that the term that can best describe the translator is that of “relay-sender”. Indeed, the translator receives and relays the message initially formulated by the original source thereby prolonging the initial unilingual communication process. Like a “relay runner” – in a typical marathon competition – would take the baton farther to his partner or to the arrival point, so too the translator reworks, and (re)transmits the message to a new set of receivers using the target language thereby making the communication process a complex multi-stage phenomenon.

Keywords: Communication Process, Translation Process, Source, Medium, Receiver

1. Introduction

Locating the translator in a classical one-flow communication model may be a complex and futile task. This is due to the fact that most models assume pure communication to principally or exclusively be an intra-lingual or unilingual process (Riegiel and Rioul 2010:3; Endong et al 2013:112; Champika et al 2012; Endong and Inyang 2014:57; Nida 1993; Jossey-Bass 1998), meanwhile translation can circumstantially be intra-lingual, inter-lingual or inter-semiotic. Such a postulation arguably indicates that the two disciplines (communication and translation) are relatively incompatible. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1984:16) however rejects the notion of a unilingual communication in her critique of Jacobson’s communication model which “faultily” stipulates that there is homogeneity of linguistic code in a typical communication context/process. She contends that it is fallacious to conceive communication as being purely unilingual as even within the same language, communication is likely to be complex and likely to involve the use of many (or at least two) idiolects, thereby implying multiple linguistic competences from the various parties (sender and receiver) involved in the process. She notes that: *D’un point de vue méthodologique, [...] cette « idéalisation théorique qu’implique le fait d’identifier la compétence du locuteur à celle de l’auditeur » [...] n’est pas aussi « légitime » [...] Il faut au contraire admettre que la communication (duelle : nous ne parlons pour l’instant que de ce cas le plus simple) se fonde sur l’existence non d’un code mais de deux idiolectes ; partant, le message lui-même se dédouble, en ce qui concerne du moins sa face signifiée.*

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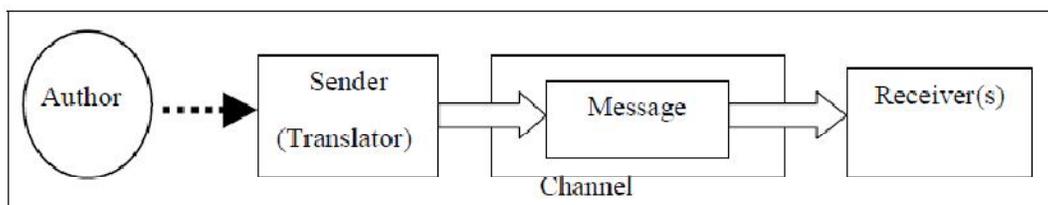
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From a methodological point of view, [...] the theoretical idealization being implied by the tendency of identifying the linguistic competence of the sender to that of the receiver [...] is not that “legitimate” [...] One should rather concede that communication being a duet, (here, we refer to the phenomenon in its simplest form) is founded on the existence not of a singular code, but of at least two idiolects. Based on this fact, the message itself is doubled, if one is, at least, to consider its part representing the signified. [Our Translation]. Besides implying the eventual use of many idiolects, the communication process (particularly in the case of translation), can perfectly involve the use of more than one linguistic code; in which case, there will be need for a more complex schematization of the communication/translation process. That is why Reiss (1970:23) views translation as a bilingual communication which is generally aimed at reproducing, in the target language, a text which is functionally equivalent to the source text. The classical and mathematical models – such as the transportation (communication) models – do not really provide a space for the translation process in general and the translator in particular. The difficulty to locate the translation process in this category of models is evidenced by the various postulations having been advanced by translation and communication theorists to determine the place of the translator in the process. While some theorists view the translator as a sender, others identify him as a medium or a “non-real” receiver. In reviewing a number of communication theories, Soukup (2011: 221) corroborates this fact thus: We could describe a translation in one or two ways. First we could regard translation as an intermediate process. A message source creates a message and transmits it through a medium (the translator) who in turn sends it on the receiver [...] Second, we could regard the translator as a creator of a new message, which reaches a receiver through some channel or other. Soukup’s observation identifies the translator simultaneously as a sender and a medium. Though backed by a wide range of arguments, this observation is somehow arguable and fallacious. Hinging on a critical review of literature, this paper attempts to explore and critique the various postulations offered to determine the place of the translator in the communication process. It attempts a re-theorization of the communication-translation process that suggests a location of the translator in the process.

2. The Translator as a Sender/Source

This postulation hinges on the fact that the translator is very active in the transmission in target language (TL) of a – more or less new – message, to a set of receivers. The translator is here considered the initiator of a communication effort and his/her transmission of the message is conducted in a bilingual or multilingual communication context. In tandem with this postulation, a number of translation practitioners, theorists and authors such as Agbogun (2012: 155 -156), Fagbohun (2009:23) and Durieux (2006) insightfully contend that the translator has its own audience which, imperatively, should be differentiated from that of the original author (the one who creates the message in the source language). In effect, the original author’s audience or public is the readership constituted by users of the source language (SL); while the translator’s public is made up of those among the general audience who use the target language (TL).

Table 1: The Translator as Sender



The conception of the translator as a sender is also grounded on some theorists’ argument that, in the process of translating/transcoding, the translator can make the message contained in the Source Text (ST) his or hers (Israel 1991:18; Gutu 2012:15). This means that there can be appropriation of the message by the translator before the re-expression of this message (to a secondary audience/readership) actually occurs in the TL. With close reference to literary translation, Israel suggests the imperativeness of this message appropriation when he explains that: “le plus souvent, l’appropriation n’est pas un choix. Elle est imposée par la nature même de l’écriture littéraire » [Most often, the appropriation of the Source Text message by the translator is not optional. It is a must, viewed the nature of literary writing” (Israel 1991:18).

Indeed, literary writing is viewed as being very connotative and often obscure in nature. The translator generally formulates a new – though not autonomous – message which is destined to a specific audience (exclusively to receivers in the TL). The newness of the message is due to the fact that the translator is bound to adjust the message to the context of the receivers in the target language. This adjustment therefore makes the message somehow different in terms of language (surface structure of the language) and presuppositions (Nida 1967, Larson 1998:3; Ekpenyong 2010:239; Endong et al 2013).

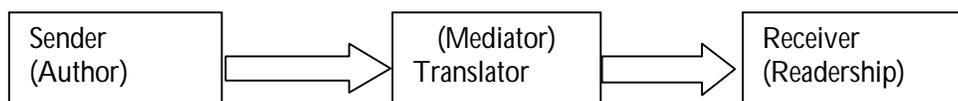
Gutu (2012:15) particularly explores this thesis when she notes, with specific reference to literary translation, that:

La traduction littéraire ne peut être que la mise au point d'autre œuvre c'est-à-dire d'un texte autonome d'un même statut. L'essentiel n'est plus alors de calquer l'original mais de produire un nouvel original qui viendra se substituer à lui-même [...] L'exactitude de l'information compte moins que la création d'un effet propre à susciter une réaction affective, une émotion esthétique voisine à celles qu'engendre le contact avec l'original. Literary translation cannot be the creation of another literary work; but an autonomous text having the same status. What is essential is therefore not to copy the original text, but rather produce a new original that will substitute it [...] The exactitude of the information contained in the source text is less important than the creation of an effect capable of provoking an affective reaction and esthetical emotion which is similar to that of the original. [Our translation] The change (in the message) may also come as a result of what Reiss calls "communicational differences" between the source and the target text (Reiss 2000:168). The communicational differences may either be intentional (caused deliberately and purposefully by the translator) and non-intentional (accidental). Intentional communication differences occur when the goal of the translator is somehow different from that of the original text (source text). The intentional communication differences between the source text and the target text represent suitable cases of appropriation of the message by the translator. They equally constitute a pertinent example where the translator is viewed as the sender of a new message. From all the arguments presented above, it may be safe to view the original text as a kind of source informing the construction of the translator's message.

3. The Translator as a Medium / Channels

According to O'Sullivan et al (1996:134), a medium is "a technological development that extends the channels, range or speed of communication". As a technical component of the communication process, a medium is theoretically capable of "transmitting codes along a channel or channels" (Dominick 2011; O'Sullivan 1996; Bruce and Douglas 2008). Considering the translator as a medium entails situating him at an intermediary position, between the author of the original message (the source) and the receiver. This conception of the transcoding metaphor is captured in Soukup's (2011:221) observation that translation could be viewed as a process whereby "a message source [the original author] creates a message and transmits it through a medium (the translator) who sends it on to the receiver". Here the translator is simplistically and arguably considered as a transmission instrument. In line with this, De Retine cited in Fagbohun (2009:6) insightfully defines translation as "un acte de communication qui permet à un auteur de passer un message à un récepteur qui ne parle pas la même langue à travers un traducteur. [a communication process which enables an author to transmit, through a translator, a message to a receptor who speaks a different language] (Our translation)".

Table 2: The Translator as a Medium



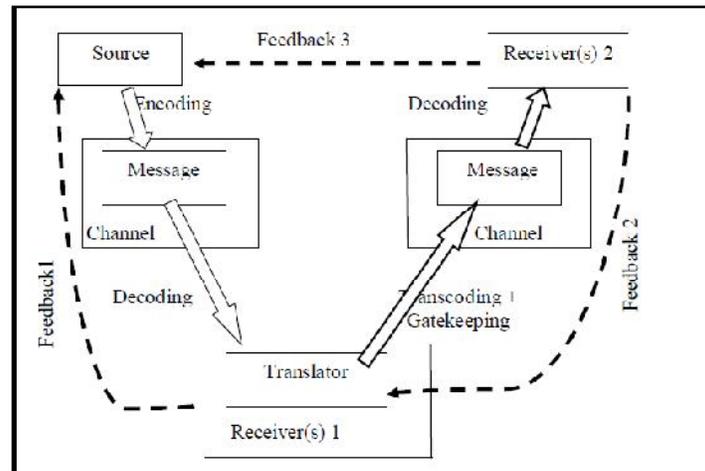
The thesis of the translator viewed as a medium has serious implications and is visibly anchored on a number of arguable claims. One of these implications and claims is that the translator is faultily considered as an automated and passive component of the communication flow. He is presented as almost inactive in the (re)configuration of the message. He is merely viewed as a channel manipulator through whom the message gets to the targeted audience (the receiver(s)). Meanwhile, the role of the translator is more complex. As earlier argued, the translator actively takes part in the change and remodeling – of both the surface structure and sometimes content – of the message through the two processes of transcoding and adaptation. This thesis equally neglects or downplays the preliminary steps through which the message passes before being received by the translator. In theory, there is a whole communication process that takes place before the translator receives that message.

In fact, in a typical translation context, the source must first use a medium and channel(s) – for instance a book or any other print medium – to reach a wide readership to which the translator belongs or with which he is versed. It is only when this preliminary communication flow is completed that the translator – as a false receiver Agbogun (2012:115) – initiates a secondary communication process involving translation. Based on all these, it is safe to argue that a schematization of the communication/translation process which locates the translator at the position of the medium is relatively exclusivist, as it basically suits only the interpretation process wherein the source is most often conscious of the inter-lingual/bilingual nature of the communication process. This means that in a typical interpretation context, the source, directly reaches the translator – through oral-aural means – before reaching the audience ultimately. Reaching the translator is a strategic and intrinsic objective; meanwhile reaching the audience is ultimate and extrinsic, given the fact that the translator must perfectly understand the message before transmitting it in the target language.

4. The Translator as a Relay-Sender

This postulation hinges on the premise that translation is a bilingual communication context and its schematization is normally supposed to entail the representation and mergence of two inter-dependable and unilingual communication processes. In effect the process of translation involves a two-flow communication process: a first one in SL (from the original author to the translator) and a second one in the TL from the translator to the receiver(s) in the targeted language (Komissarov 1996; Reiss 2000; Endong et al 2013; Perez and Wilson 2006; Prashant 2000; Jossey-Bass 1998). Komissarov (1996:84) corroborates this fact in his observation that the phenomenon of translation has to be looked upon from a dualistic point of view since the message (the context, the meaning) is first encoded (given form) in another language and then decoded (received, understood) and only then transcoded (given another form) into another language. It is here, in this process of transcoding, that the crux of translation is to be found because translation skill (translation art, craft), in my opinion, is nothing but the skill of matching the patterns of two different languages against the background of one and the same objective: extra-linguistic reality structured differently by two given languages. Based on the observation above, translation (and the translator by implication), is the “conjunction” linking the two interdependent communication processes. Though the translator is at the end of the preliminary communication process (among the audience in SL), he is not considered a “real” receiver. Agbogun (2012:155) corroborates this view in his assertion that:

Le traducteur n'est pas un destinataire normal. Et, on ne peut pas le qualifier de destinataire car le texte ne lui est jamais adressé. Pour illustrer ce point, signalons que les indications scéniques approvisionnées aux personnages par le dramaturge dans une pièce de théâtre sont propres à lui-même. The translator cannot be considered as a normal receiver. He should not be considered a receiver because the text is not addressed to him. To illustrate this fact, one should note that the stage directions designed by a playwright in a drama are destined to guide the author himself [Our translation]. Endong et al (2013: 168) observe that the translator should rather be considered as the element within the communication/translation process that “makes possible the prolongation of the communication process, from the end of the intra-lingual communication to the inter-lingual one”. In effect the translator is a second (relay) sender, and the translation exercise is a secondary communication, naturally occurring after the original author has reached his primary audiences (those in the SL) (Reiss 2000, Endong et al 2013). The translator is both a medium and the initiator of the inter-lingual communication. Endong and Inyang's (2014) double flow model of communication and translation is apt in illustrating this conception of the translator:

Table 3: Two-Flow Model of Communication and Translation

5. Conclusion

This paper has critically reviewed a range of conflicting postulations that sought to locate the translator in a classical and double-flow process of communication. It argued that though theorists do acknowledge that translation is a communication process or a process embedded in basic communication processes, it appears relatively difficult to clearly locate the translator in a classical communication model. Attempts at locating the translator in the communication process have resulted in concurrent postulations; and it is not an overstatement to claim that the debate on the issue is still on. A number of communication and translation theorists, have argued that the translator plays the role of a sender for two principal reasons: firstly, s/he is creator of a new – though non-autonomous – message. The newness of the message is thanks principally to the surface remodeling of the message, the change in linguistic structures. The second argument is that the translator is often believed to have his/her own public (the receivers in the target language) which is totally different from that of the original author. However, a counter school of thought considers the translator to be a kind of medium as s/he operates at an intermediary position assuming the role of a mediator between the original author and the receiver. This paper has argued that the translator is a relay-sender as he receives and relays the message initially formulated by the original source thereby prolonging the initial unilingual communication process. Like a “relay runner” – in a typical marathon competition – would take the baton farther to his partner or to the arrival point, so too the translator (re)transmits the message to a new set of receivers using the target language thereby making the communication process a chain or a complex multi-stage phenomenon.

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