

The Relevance of Linguistics to Translation and Its Implications for Translator-Training

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Abstract

Linguistics, the scientific study of language, has made enormous contributions to the development of languages. It has as well enhanced human communication in diverse ways. This discipline has in no small way facilitated the advancement of the language services especially translation. In view of this, this study seeks to x-ray the relevance of linguistics to translation. It also seeks to examine the implications of the link between linguistics and translation to translator-training. After reviewing the existing literature, it was discovered that developments in the study of linguistics in the 1950s and 1960s led to the emergence of a more systematic translation theories and practice. Consequently, it was posited that linguistics should be integrated into every translator-

training programme as a way of enhancing the professional competence of translators.

Introduction

Linguistics and translation are two disciplines with one common factor – language. While the former is the scientific study of language, the latter is a profession that cannot be exercised without languages. It was this close link perhaps that led to the study of translation as a unit of contrastive linguistics many years before the advent of translation studies as a discipline, (Baker, 2011). Translation theorists drew extensively from other disciplines such as psychology, communication theory, literary theory, anthropology, philosophy and cultural studies (Baker, 2001:279). Translation has equally been greatly influenced by developments in linguistics, hence the present study.

Translation as a human endeavour has been practised for close to two thousand years before the advent of linguistics as a discipline (Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi, 2014:311). This fact could make one think that linguistics could not have influenced translation in any way. This is not true as debates on translation in those early years centred on literal and free translation techniques (Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi, 2014:311). There is no doubt that the renewed efforts in researches on translation in the second half of the twentieth century was as a result of developments in linguistics at that same period in history. It has equally been argued that it was the basic theories of translation raised by linguistics in the 1950s and 1960s' that led to a more systematic analysis of translation during that particular time (Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi, 2014:310).

So much has changed in the field of translation in the last five decades. We no longer talk about literal and free translations only. Some other new theories and methods have since emerged. A thorough examination of the history of translation will reveal that this human activity has two main periods. The first was what Newmark quoted by Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi called the pre-linguistic period of translation (2014:311). The second could be described as the post-linguistic or modern era of translation.

The pre-linguistic era was the period when emphasis was placed on literal and free translations. The focal point then was the source text (SL) and the author of the source text. The translator did all he could to deliver the source text semantically and structurally to the target reader in his own language. In the new era, however, the emphasis seems to be shifting to the target text (TT) and the target audience. The translator strives to communicate the message of the source text to the target audience, using linguistic structures that make the translated text more accessible to the target readers.

It is in the light of all these developments that this paper seeks to examine the relevance of linguistics to translation. After the introduction, the concepts of linguistics and translation will be examined. Thereafter, the link between linguistics and translation will be x-rayed. The translator-training programmes of three Nigerian universities will be highlighted. There will be discussion on the implications of the findings for translator-training. Finally, there will be conclusion.

The Concept of Linguistics:

There is consensus of opinion when it comes to the definition of linguistics as a concept. Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (Revised Edition) defines linguistics as “the scientific study of language” Kolawole (2013:3) defines it as “language-specific

science” while Crystal (1976:37) views the same concept as “the academic, scientific study of language.” All the authors cited above highlight the scientific-nature of linguistic study. Crystal probably added academic to stress the highly intellectual and theoretical nature of this kind of study, as opposed to the extensive practicals involved in the physical sciences. The same author also stated that, for any linguistic study to be considered scientific, the procedure must be explicit, systematic and objective (Crystal, 1976:78).

According to him, “explicitness,” “systematicness”, and “objectivity” are the hallmarks of every scientific enterprise (Crystal, 1976:78). Aspects of language which linguistics examines include “linguistic structure or analytical methods such as phonetics, grammar and vocabulary (Kolawole, 2013:9). For any linguistic investigation to be deemed scientific, irrespective of the aspect of language involved, the procedure adopted should be explicit, systematic and objective. From the foregoing, it can be argued that linguistics is the study of language in a systematic, objective and explicit manner. Having clarified the concept of linguistics, we would proceed by examining the concept of translation.

The Concept of Translation:

Eke (2000:328) views translation as “a linguistic exercise.” Efika and Okeogu (2000:325) describe it as “a tool for linguistic engineering.” The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (Revised Edition) defines translation as “a word, speech, written text that has been put into one language from another”. The above definition highlights the product of the professional activity called translation. The act of translating involves a process that requires

skill, training and experience (Morry Sofer, 2004:15). Many, especially the uninitiated only see translation as the passage from one language to another; however, most experts in this field of human endeavour also view the act of translating as the passage from one culture to another (Cordonnier, 2002:1; Mounin 1963:236; Summer-Paulin, 1995:548; Wuilmart, 1990:239).

The translator is not only conversant with the structures of his two working languages but he is fully aware of the two cultures from which the two languages evolved. This surely will facilitate any linguistic operation he may wish to carry out in both languages as the need arises. Viewing translation as a “linguistic exercise,” “a tool for linguistic engineering” or “a linguistic operation” only brings to the fore the indispensable element in this professional activity – language. Proficiency in the working languages is the only condition that guarantees success of any translation activity. This implies that in any translator-training programmes serious efforts should be made to acquaint the translator-trainee with the structures of his working languages.

The Link between Linguistics and Translation:

A thorough examination of the two concepts will reveal that linguistics and translation are two different disciplines with a common denominator-language. The former does a systematic and objective analysis of language while the latter applies the same language in effecting intercultural communications. In his article on “Linguistic approaches” (Fawcett (2001:120) said:

The relationship of linguistics to translation can be twofold: one can apply the findings of linguistics to the practice of translation, and one can have a linguistic theory of translation.

The above observation is very true as linguistics has extensively influenced translation in those two key areas – formulation and reformulation of theories and influencing translation practice in diverse ways. Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi (2014:311) quoted Hodges (2009) as having said that “Early attempt at translation studies can be traced back over 2,000 years around the key notions of literal and free approach.” For so many years, discussions in this domain centred on literal and free translations only. This could be because little or nothing was done in terms of analyzing the structures and functions of the languages in use at that time, hence it was referred to as the pre-linguistic period of translation (Newmark cited by Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi, 2014:311).

However, positive developments in the study of linguistics in the 1950s and 1960s had tremendous influence on translation studies. It was the Russian-American structuralist Roman Jakobson who highlighted the linguistic aspects of translation in 1959 after more than 2000 years of translation practice. In his paper “On Linguistic Aspect of Translation” he gave the different aspects of translation to include: (1) intralingual, (2) interlingual and (3) intersemiotic (as cited in Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi, 2014:311-312). Other translation theoreticians who were influenced by developments in linguistics include: Eugene Nida, Catford and Vinay and Darbelnet. As Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi highlighted, Jakobson was greatly influenced by Saussure while Eugene Nida drew extensively from Chomsky's grammatical theories. The Canadian linguists, Jean Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet did a comparative analysis of English and French languages after which they came up with translation methods that translators have used for more than four decades (Amirshoja'i and Ghoreishi, 2014:315).

According to these authors, the efforts of Vinay and Darbelnet culminated in the enunciation of two translation. The two strategies were direct and oblique translation comprising seven procedures: borrowing, calque, literal for direct and transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation for oblique translation, later known as shift strategies. It should be noted that contrastive analysis adopted by the two Canadian researchers is one aspect of linguistics. It is also worthy of note that Nida's *Theory of Dynamic Equivalence* is the same as sociolinguistics of translation since it focuses on the target-text reader who differs from the source-text reader in language, culture and world knowledge (Fawcett, 2001:121).

Apart from its contribution in the development of more systematic theories of translation, linguistics has influenced the attitude of translators in some other ways. During the "pre-linguistic era" the duty of the translator was to render the source text (ST) into the target text (TT) in a manner that both the structure and sense of the source text are maintained. Following the influence of sociolinguistics, which is a unit of linguistics, the translator is now interested in the way the translated work will be received by the target reader. As Nida (2001:24) pointed out, "Sociolinguistics is concerned with the ways in which people use language to accomplish various purposes."

The knowledge of the use of language to achieve different purposes in the society, which is one of the products of the scientific study of language, has greatly contributed to the new approaches the translator has adopted in the exercise of his professional duty. The translator no longer works for the purpose of achieving structural and semantic similarity with the source text, as was the case during the pre-linguistic period; but he now gives a serious consideration on the possible effects of the choices he has made on his target readers. It is also obvious that, due to its

irrelevance in translating complex linguistics structures, the translator no longer shows keen interest on literal translation as was the case before now. The scientific study of language revealed the uniqueness of each language; hence the translator strives to use the linguistic elements of the target text in expressing the message of the source text. Jakobson made it clear that “translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes” (Amirshoja’i and Ghoreishi, 2014:312). Thus, we cannot but agree with Kolawole (2013:7) that “the knowledge of linguistics is therefore a sure way of improving the quality of translation.”

Other Contributions of Linguistics to Translation:

Having established a strong link between linguistics and translation, we will, in this segment, discuss the other “linguistic tools” that could be applied to translation. Fawcett (2001:122) quoted Catford as having said in 1965 that “it is clearly necessary for translation-theory to draw upon a theory of meaning.” Following this observation, Fawcett indicated that:

Linguistics did fairly quickly come to the task of modelling meaning both at word and sentence level. To describe meaning at word level, it produced concepts such as denotation, connotation, componential analysis, and semantic fields; and to describe sentence meaning it generated concepts such as presupposition and entailment.

The terms denotation and connotation have been used over the years in relation to meanings of words but little did many know that they were solutions offered by linguistics to the problems

encountered by language service providers. The concept of meaning is key to translation practice and any translator that fails to get it right is likely to have serious problems in exercising his functions at any given time. For instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe wrote: “His happiest moments were the two or three moons after the harvest: (p. 4 line 6). The above statement was translated into French by the translator, Michel Ligny as “Ses moments les plus heureux étaient les deux ou trois lunes qui suivaient la récolte” (P. 11 line 1).

The word “moon” is defined by the Chambers 21st Century Dictionary as “the Earth’s natural satellite, illuminated to varying degrees by the sun depending on its position and often visible in the sky, especially at night.” Though the same dictionary added that “month” is the literary or old use of the word “moon”, it may not be out of place to state that the average European would understand “moon” as the natural satellite of the earth. The time setting of the novel makes it difficult for any reader to apply the second meaning of the word. The average French, reader also understands “lune” to mean “a satellite of the Earth”.

In Igbo culture which Chinua Achebe projects in his novel, however, the word “moon” (onwa in Igbo) could mean “the satellite of the Earth” or “month” depending on the context. It is the second meaning, “month” which is intended in the context in which it is used. This implies that the use of “lune” instead of “mois” in the French version of *Things Fall Apart* is inappropriate. This explains why we say that the concept of meaning is pivotal in the exercise of any translation activity. Fawcatt (2001:122) concludes as follows:

The importance of these concepts for translation is that their application in comparative linguistics demonstrates

clearly that the meanings and meaning structures of one language do not match those of another. From a linguistic point of view, one could almost say that each language is full of gaps in relation to other languages.

It is linguistics that highlighted the need to view each language as being unique. This is, indeed, very true because each language is unique not only semantically as highlighted above but also structurally. For the English language to express the present progressive, there is usually an auxiliary verb. For instance:

The boy is coming.

The teacher is going to school.

The French language, on the other hand, uses a simple verb form to express the same condition:

Le garçonvient.

Le professeurva à l'école

The above examples clearly illustrate the uniqueness of languages as highlighted by linguistic studies.

Another aspect of linguistics that has so much to offer translation is pragmatics which has been defined as “the study of the purposes for which sentences are used, of the real world conditions under which a sentence may be appropriately used as an utterance” (Stalnaker, 1972 as quoted by Hatim (2001:179). In pragmatics every utterance is said to have a sense or reference to specific events, persons or objects, a force and an overall effect. There is

also implied meaning and cooperative principle which the translator can benefit from. With regard to implied meaning, Hatim (2001:181) explains as follows:

Language users can evoke and interpret implied meanings by leaving certain things unsaid as speakers or interpreting what is said against the background of what could have been said as hearers.

Hatim also quoted Grice (1975) as having given the cooperative principle which should guide human interaction and which language users should adhere to. The cooperative principle according to him includes:

Quantity – Make your contribution as informative as is required.

Quality – Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relevance – Be relevant

Manner – Be communicatively orderly.

While highlighting what the translator stands to gain from the notion of implicatures, Hatim continues as follows:

Appreciation of implied meaning facilitates comprehension which would otherwise be blurred. In terms of re-producing the message in the target language, on the other hand, the meanings which are implied and not stated could be the last court of appeal in assessing adequate equivalence. This last point is particularly relevant in working with languages which are both culturally and linguistically remote from each other.

As Hatim explained above, the notion of implicatures could be of much help to the translator in decoding any text before him, no

matter how complex the text may be. In the same way, the cooperative principle could be a very useful guide as the translator produces the target text.

If pragmatics studies the real world conditions under which an utterance may be used as highlighted by stalnaker, one may argue that it is the inability to understand this aspect of linguistics that led to the error mentioned in the French translation of *Things Fall Apart*. The use of lune (moon) instead of mois (month) which made the comprehension of that part of the target text difficult for the readers could be attributed to either excessive foreignization or inadequate knowledge of pragmatic analysis especially in the context in question. Translation has equally benefited immensely from text linguistic research. Translation theorists have drawn some inspiration from two aspects of this research – register analysis and text typologies.

Hatim (2001:262) describes register analysis as the “study of language variation.” The revelation by Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964 as quoted by Hatim) that “language varies as its function varies” has led to the clarification of “aspects of message construction such as field or subject matter, tenor or level of formality and mode or the distinction between speech and writing” (Hatim, 2001:262). With regard to text-typologies, Hatim quoted Crystal and Davy 1969 and Beaugrande and Dressler 1981 as having observed that:

Texts have been classified according to criteria such as field of discourse, and statements were made about subject matter as the basis for lumping texts together, giving rise to types such as journalistic texts, religious texts, scientific texts and so on... Another trend in text-type research has taken domain as the basis for developing a different

classification of texts into types such as literary, poetic and didactic (p. 263).

It is obvious that, over the years, texts to be translated have been grouped into any of the above categories. It is also known to practitioners in the translation industry that different strategies have been developed by translation theorists for translating all the categories of texts above. What is however new to some practitioners in the field especially the young ones is the revelation of the linguistic origin of this knowledge which they have found very useful and indispensable in the exercise of their professional duties. It is also necessary to stress that a good translator should be able to identify the genre of the text he is translating so as to use the appropriate register during the process of conversion.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that linguistic findings in the last five decades have helped to broaden the knowledge base of the professional translator. From semantics to syntax, from the notion of implicatures to cooperative principle and from register analysis to text-typologies, the contributions of linguistic science have been very unprecedented. There is no doubt that linguistic prowess accounts for success in translation especially in literary translation that has not been invaded by information and communication technology. The basic tool of the translator is language. Mastery of his two working languages is key to his success as a professional. Revelations in this study have shown that linguistics can be of much use to the translator in his quest to master his two working languages. This explains why studies in linguistics should be part of any translator training programme aimed at producing competent translators. We shall now examine the translator – training programmes of three universities in

Nigeria – Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Abia State University, Uturu.

Translator-Training Programmes in Three Universities in Nigeria

Courses in translation studies are usually offered at the Post-graduate level in most Nigerian universities. We shall review the translation courses offered in Ebonyi State University which is modeled on the programmes of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. We shall also compare these with what obtains at Abia State University, Uturu. Below is the course outline for the M.A. Translation programme of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.

First Semester

- Research Methods
- Theory and Methodology of Translation
- Advanced Composition and Stylistics
- Issues in Literary and Non-Literary Translation
- Practice in Literary Translation

Second Semester

- Introduction to comparative Literature
- Critical appreciation of Literary Translation
- Practice in Non-Literary Translation
- Project Report

The programme of Abia State University has almost all the courses mentioned above with the exception of “Introduction to

Comparative Literature.” However, in Abia State University, the programme also includes courses such as:

- Sci-Tech Translation
- Terminological Research

From the foregoing, it is very clear that linguistics as a discipline has no place in the programme of translation studies in these universities.

Implications for Translator-Training

The non-inclusion of linguistics as a course of study has a lot of implications on the quality of products of translator–training institutions. This implies that students could graduate without having an inkling of the enormous contributions of linguistics in the advancement of translation. Such students may also read or hear about the translation theorists such as Roman Jakobson, Eugene A. Nida, Catford, Jean Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet without knowing their backgrounds and what inspired them. Translating without good knowledge of linguistics is like attempting to drive a car without the relevant driving skills. Such a translator may sometimes produce good translations but he may find it very difficult to give the technical details of the procedures he uses. Eugene A Nida (2001:25) in his article “Bible Translation” told a story of a certain Bible Translator in West Africa as follows:

After completing the translation of the Bible in one of the major trade languages of West Africa, the translator returned home on leave of absence and decided to take some courses in linguistics. He soon realized how many

mistakes he had made in his early work, and upon returning to the field he asked the responsible committee to let him revise his translation. But he was told that he had no right to change the word of the Lord.

Linguistics, the scientific study of language opens the eyes of the translator to the potentialities of his working languages. It also enables him to better appreciate the translation theories he uses in his day to day operations. Denying a translator-trainee the opportunity of studying linguistics is like asking a sprinter to begin a race with his eyes blindfolded. He may get to the end but that may not be without some falls and some bruises. Consequently, we feel very strongly that the inclusion of some courses in linguistics in the programme of translation studies will surely enhance the quality of the products of such institutions. It will not only enable such translators to operate on a very familiar linguistic terrain but it will also boost the capabilities of such translators in appreciating and clarifying some technical details about their job.

Conclusion

In this work, we examined the relevance of linguistics to translation and the implications of this relevance to translator-training. It was discovered, in the course of the work, that linguistics has had tremendous influence on translation not only by influencing the reformulation of translation theories but also in affecting the operational behaviour of translators. It was also revealed that, in spite of this enormous influence, linguistics has hardly been part of the translator-training programmes of some universities especially in Nigeria.

It was, therefore, posited that linguistics should be integrated into the translator-training programmes in universities as a way of enhancing the linguistic and professional competence of translators.

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