

The overview of common ground in translation studies: definition, translation types, texts and meaning, and text types

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Abstract

In this globalized and digitalized world, translation activities play a crucial role in facilitating interlingual communication, opening access to knowledge and information worldwide, and strengthening cultural exchange across the globe. This paper discusses the essential issues related to translation, translation types, texts and meaning, and the types of texts in translation. Each part explores translation theories from pioneers of translation theories such as Jakobson, Catford, Nida and Taber, Newmark, and Larson, while modern theories such as Munday and others are also elaborated to provide a common ground for translation practice.

Keywords: *Translation studies, translation definition, translation types, text and meaning, text types*

1. Introduction

In the development of translation activities until today, English as an international language has become one of the most frequently used languages. The majority of countries around the world, might not be able to avoid using English in particular bilingual or multilingual agendas involving their mother tongues or any other international languages. Within the situation, translation activities are crucial in countries whose people have a low level of English skills. In order to get engaged in the global communication, translation activities are necessary for supporting particular communication purposes. In this globalized and digitalized world, translation activities play a crucial role in (1) facilitating interlingual communication, (2) opening access to knowledge and information worldwide, and (3) strengthening cultural exchange across the globe.

In academic contexts particularly in the higher education, most of the academic activities of lecturers and students are supported by the results of translation activities. There are many scholarly sources including papers and textbooks are written in English. National and international book publishers work with translators to translate textbooks from English into a national language or *vice versa*. In Indonesia, many lecturers send their papers to translators to be translated into English before being sent to a scholarly journal. Students either send their works to translator or consult to translation machine before submitting their assignments to their lecturers. These practices are common in universities in Indonesia and other countries. Therefore, translators and academia, including the students of English Major in Indonesian universities, either for job or their study, take the opportunity of translating English sources into Indonesian or translating Indonesian texts into English.

With the plethora of translation activities worldwide, this paper reviews the fundamentals of translation theory and practice. This paper discusses the essential issues related to translation, translation types, texts and meaning, and the types of texts in translation. Each part explores translation theories from pioneers of translation theories such as Jakobson, Catford, Nida and Taber, Newmark, and Larson, while modern theories such as Munday and others are also elaborated to provide a common ground for translation practice.

2. The meaning of translation

The word translation was firstly acknowledged to be used since 1340, taken from an Old French or Latin word translation which means transporting (Munday et al., 2022). *Transporting* means a process or activity of conveying something from one place to another, normally things, and in translation is not physical things, but messages.

English dictionaries can help us clarify further on what translation means, for example, by investigating its word family, such as: to translate (verb), translator (noun), translatable (adjective), and translatability (noun). A transitive verb to translate means to turn into one's own or another language. The word translator is a noun having meaning a person who carries out translation activity; can be either a professional or inexperienced one. A noun translatability means an extent to which or possibility of a text for being translated from/into other language(s). An adjective translatable means a condition in which a text in a language can be translated into another language. Thus, the word family reveals that translation is an event, activity, or process of turning message (in translatable semiotics; can be a text or symbols) from one language to another language (both have translatability) carried out by a person or a group of people (translator(s)).

The word translation is now commonly used as an English word which can possibly mean three things (see Munday et al., 2022, p.8):

1. *a discipline* of translation
2. *a process* of translation
3. *a product* of translation

In Indonesian, the word translation is translated *penerjemahan* which can mean a discipline and a process, nevertheless, it cannot mean the product of translation. Translation as a product is translated into a different word *terjemahan*.

Translation as a process is now a global term usually understood as a human activity of conveying meaning or message from a language into another language. This common notion is both philosophical in terms of the humanity nature and orientation, and practical in terms of how to convey the message or meaning. It is sufficient for present translation *praxis*. The process of translating involves some mechanical words associated to translation process such as *text* (verbal), *signs/symbols* (non-verbal), *message, form*, and *language*. Translation is not limited only within the verbal forms but also non-verbal forms of languages. Translation can involve one, two or more verbal and non-verbal language. While related to humanity orientation, perhaps, one might argue that computer technology can now do excellent translation, so why shall we limit the definition of translation within the human activity?

This philosophical question has an obvious answer. Despite its' significant contribution in the translation tasks, computer technology is merely instrumental for human purposes and values. It works as it is programmed or instructed. With AI technology, it can now imitate human's sense but not the real sense. This area of translation study is called Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) which means that computer can *only* assist translation activity. When we put it in a traditional spectrum or continuum of translation between *word-for-word* or literal, in one edge and *sense-for-sense* or meaning-based translation in the other one, CAT is useful in the continuum of literal translation in some degree in which the source language predominates the process, but not in the other edge of the continuum which requires translators to sense the embedded meaning which can be political, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions of the message (Figure 2.1). In this view, translation activity is fundamentally beyond a mechanical process of resulting message in other language.



Figure 2.1 *The continuum of CAT's roles*

Translation is traditionally understood in light of linguistic theories. Pioneers of translation theories such as Jakobson (2021), Catford (1965), Nida and Taber (2021), Newmark (1988), and Larson (1998) have defined translation based on their particular

linguistic theories. They are presented in Table 2.1 based on the order of the first publication year.

Table 2.1 Comparison of translation definitions

No	Theorists	Definition of translation	Overview
1	Jakobson (1959/2021)	An interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language	Jakobson distinguishes between intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation. Jakobson's interlingual translation refers to the term <i>translation</i> that is commonly addressed by scholars in translation studies. The word interpretation denotes the complexities of meaning in translation process which relies on the translators' knowledge, ability, and subjectiveness in revealing it in other language(s).
2	Catford (1965)	The replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)	This definition shows the prominence of linguistics in translation process. In this view, translation cannot be unplugged from linguistics. Different from Jakobson, Catford sees translation as a linguistics process of replacing textual materials from SL to TL. The expected equivalence can be achieved when a translator follows linguistically-oriented procedures focusing on the textual materials. While the meaning is still there; it does not matter what language is used to express it.
3	Nida and Taber (1969/2021)	The reproduction in the receptor language of the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style	The definition means that the translation should convey the same meaning and style as the original text, but in a way that is natural and appropriate for the target audience. The definition emphasises on the notion of translation equivalence. Nida and Taber distinguish between two types of equivalence: formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. Formal correspondence focuses on the literal and grammatical accuracy of the translation between SL and TL, while dynamic

			equivalence focuses on the communicative effect and cultural relevance of the translation.
4	Newmark (1988)	Rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text	This definition is similar to Nida and Taber's, unless, the objectiveness of translation process is undermined by the role of the author in Newmark's definition. It emphasizes the importance of conveying the intended meaning of the source text in the target language represented by the author's intention. In Newmark's view, translation can be seen as a continuum between the emphasis on SL (he calls word-for-word translation) and the emphasis on TL (communicative translation).
5	Larson (1984)	A process of changing form that consists of transferring meaning and restructuring it from one language to another	Similar to Catford, Larson dichotomizes between form and meaning, and emphasises more on meaning rather than form. The process of changing form consists of transferring and restructuring activities which are similar to Nida and Taber's tenet of translation process. The source form carries the meanings, which are encoded and recorded in the source wordings, which should be re-expressed and maintained in the target form. In other words, only the form changes. These meanings should then be transferred, encoded, and recorded into the new target wordings

The definition of translation in Table 2.1 represents the influence of linguistics theories in translation studies in the 1980s and 1990s. Five theorists above offer specific understanding of what translation is, that are still useful and discussed until today. Their definitions show the underpinning concepts of translation that can be categorised into three perspectives on what meaning is (Table 2.2). Catford (1965) and Larson (1984) dichotomize meaning and form, and focusing the translation process on the replacement or changing of the linguistics forms of sources language into the target language. In their views, meaning is independent and important in translation, thus, as far as a translator can cope well with the linguistically-oriented translation process, the meaning will remain

there. On the other hand, Nida and Taber (2021) and Newmark (1988) consider that translation is more complex than merely the replacement of the form. They are interested in the notion of equivalence, therefore, translation involves the reproduction or rendering of meaning from SL to TL. All aspects in the source text needs to be reproduced in the same intention and nature of why the source text is written by the author. While Jakobson (2021) considers translation subjective task of interpreting source text meaning depending on the translator’s knowledge and ability. In this view, meaning in the source language is seen as unfixed entity that will be reproduced in target language.

Table 2.2 *Meaning according to the theorists*

<i>Meaning is independent and separated from form</i>	<i>Meaning is complex entity embedded on form, thus translation is all about equivalence</i>	<i>Meaning is abstract and unfixed, subject to interpretation</i>
<i>Catford (1965)</i>	<i>Nida and Taber (1969/2021)</i>	<i>Jakobson (1959/2021)</i>
<i>Larson (1984)</i>	<i>Newmark (1988)</i>	

Currently, with the development of humanism, critical perspective, and ecological approach in Linguistics, the traditional way of seeing language is challenged; including how to see communication and translation (See Ricento, 2000; van Lier, 2004; Fill and Penz, 2017; Alexander and Stibbe, 2014; Novawan et.al., 2022, and others). Humanism focuses on the values of translation to human being, critical perspective focuses on power relations and social inequalities in translation, while the ecological approach views translation as part of a larger ecosystem. These three perspectives can complement each other to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what language, communication, and translation and their role in society. Particularly, recently, the notion of ecological translation or eco-translation (See Gengshen, 2021; Cronin, 2017; Shread, 2023, and others) that has been coined since 2004, has challenged scholars to connect translation with other disciplines. Similar to the responses to eco-linguistics which varies depending on specific philosophical underpinnings, the notion of eco-translation opens a new debate in translation which expands translation studies into a wider perspective. Therefore, defining translation in the views of science or linguistics (e.g. Nida and Taber) and communicative function (e.g. Newmark) is not enough for today’s translation studies.

3. Types of translation

In translation, people work with language. Language is represented with verbal (texts) and non-verbal (signs, symbols) forms. Some highly-cited translation sources such as Munday et.al. (2022), Bassnett (2013), Nida (1964), and Newmark (1988) have referred

to Jacobson's (1959/2021) types of translation: *intralingual*, *interlingual*, and *intersemiotic* to clarify what involves in the translation process.

Intralingual translation is expressing a text differently in the same language by using different words while preserving the original meaning. It is also known rewording or paraphrasing. In academic writing, paraphrasing is a useful skill that can enhance the students' writing competency. Paraphrasing occurs when a writer simplifies technical words or complex sentences, modifies a text for different audiences, clarifies unclear message in a text, and summarizes a huge volume of information. The skill is currently popular within this digitalized and globalized workplace especially under the headings of journalism, social media, content creation, and others. Journalists investigate information in one language and produce their own "text" in the same language by doing rewording/paraphrasing. Content creators produce their contents by doing rewording/paraphrasing on the information they have collected. Secretaries write summaries and reports which consist of reworded and paraphrased texts from the actual information.

Interlingual translation is translating a text from one language to other languages. This type of translation is what people usually understand as *translation*; *turning the message of a text from source to target language*. Thus, the word *translation* in dictionaries and books is commonly used to refer to *interlingual translation*. Similarly, some popular definitions of translation offered by translation experts refer to this type of translation. For example, Catford (1965) who defines translation as the replacement of textual material in the source language (SL) by equivalent textual material in the target language (TL). Catford believes that language consists of meaning and form, while they are separated in nature. In translation, a translator replaces the form from a language to another language, while the meaning is still there. As a linguist, Catford restricts his definition within the linguistics elements he calls *extent* (full and partial translation), *level* (all of these phonological, graphological, lexis, and grammar, called *total translation*, and only one of them, called *restricted translation*), and *rank* (of morphology).

Nida and Taber (2021), on the other hand, define translation as the reproduction of "the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message" in the target language (p). Having a similar tenet, Newmark (1988) defines translation as "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in a way that the author intended the text" (p.). The words *rendering the meaning* used by Newmark has linguistically the same notion as Nida and Taber's *reproduction of meaning*. They mean translation activity intends to preserve message or meaning in a different language. However, the phrases "in the way that the author intended the text" (Newmark, 1988) and "the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message" (Nida and Taber, 2021), can have slightly different interpretation. The former emphasises the importance of the original text's author while the later tends to be more neutral by highlighting equivalency of the text rather than the

subjectivity of the author. Nida and Taber are interested more in meaning reproduction despite forms are also important representation of the meaning. They believe that message is central in translation. Translators can sometimes conform imperfect textual structure in some wise extent depending on the context and need in order to preserve the message of the text in the source language.

Intersemiotic translation is translating verbal forms or a text in one language into non-verbal forms either in the same language or different language, or *vice versa*. An example of this type of translation is presented in a YouTube video entitled “4K JFC Grand Carnival 2022 || Day 2 End” uploaded by Top Tour Lovers Channel (<https://youtu.be/QhsQuxrVwDg>). The video presents the performance of an internationally-recognized Jember Fashion Carnival (JFC) in 2022. The video shows how JFC transfers the historical and cultural heritages of the world, particularly the Indonesian, into a modern fashion carnival. There are messages, values, and stories behind the shown fashion performed in JFC (messages/texts are transferred into fashion) and the video translates them into the narration throughout the performance in the video. *Intersemiotic translation* occurs, firstly, when the historical and cultural heritages are transformed into unique fashion; in this case, the verbal symbols are translated into non-verbal symbols. Secondly, when the video creator added voice over which narrates the message to the audiences, non-verbal symbols are translated into verbal symbols. This type of translation is ubiquitous within the context of multilingualism and digitalisation.

4. Texts and meaning

Within the process of *interlingual translation*, the role of text is central. There is no translation without a text because a text represents particular message or meaning that has to be preserved in translation by changing the language. For translation being able to preserve the message, a translator, firstly, has to comprehend the original text; what is in the text, why it is written, in what situation or context, to whom it is written, and other similar basic questions related to the text.

As previously highlighted, translation facilitates interlingual communication and text is central in this communication. Before understanding a text, a translator needs to know the nature of text in translation. Borrowing Nida and Taber’s (2021) words, a text can be defined as any *occurrence* of language, or in Newmark’ (1988) terms *communicative occurrence*, and in Catford’s (1965) definition *an instance of language use*. This occurrence is a self-contained unit of language that is sufficient in itself in conveying meaning without prior knowledge of the readers (Nida and Taber, 2021). A text is meaningful, coherent, and can be in the forms of spoken and written (Nida and Taber, 2021; Newmark, 1988). Communication and translation are manifested and only actual through text. Since there cannot be communication without a text, a text can be

understood as *evidence* for communication. A text is also *evidence* for translation, and in a broader sense, *evidence* for language use.

Bearing in mind that a text is functional in communication and translation, taking the benefits of functional theories of language is necessary to underpin translation praxis. Since a text is always purposeful and written for particular purposes within a particular context, clarifying text based on its type is crucial influencing the process of translation. Inspired by Jacobson's (2021) work, Nida and Taber (2021) categorize texts based on their communicative functions into three types: *informative*, *expressive*, and *directive*. Halliday (1978), while outlining the principles of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), identifies three main types of genre-based texts: *expository*, *narrative*, and *argumentative*. Newmark (1988), on the other hand, takes Bühler's (1934) three main functions of language to clarify his translation theories: *the informative*, *the expressive*, and *the vocative*. Despite the three main types of text, theorists and translators find their additional text types which can be associated to the three. For example, Newmark (1988) identifies three other texts based on their functions: *aesthetic*, *phatic*, and *metalingual* which can mostly be included into the expressive text, but can also be into the other two.

Table 4.1 Comparison of Text Types According to the Experts

No	References	Content-oriented text	Author-oriented text	Reader-oriented text
1	Nida and Taber	Informative	Expressive	Directive
2	Halliday	Expository	Narrative	Argumentative
3	Newmark	Informative	Expressive	Vocative

These three versions of text types have similarities in terms of the text functions (Table 4.1). Comparing from experts to experts, from time to time, the functional pattern of the text can be focused on the orientation of the text or what is the main purpose of the text. Based on this, texts can be divided into three:

1. *content-oriented texts*
2. *author-oriented texts*
3. *reader oriented texts*

Firstly, *content-oriented texts* are those written primarily to deliver the substantial messages with an emphasis on the objectivity and accuracy of the message intended to either a wide range of readers or specific ones. *Informative* and *expository texts* can be included into this category. These are written to explain, describe, and inform knowledge and factual information such as textbook, academic paper, report, thesis, dissertation, meeting minute, technical manuals, news reports, and encyclopaedia. In these texts, the authors' idea is not as important as the neutrality and objectivity of the text content. Albeit intellectuality of the author is paramount in producing the texts, he/she devotes his/her knowledgeability for creating the accurate, actual, and objective texts. Secondly, *author-*

oriented texts are written to express the authors' perspectives and imagination regardless of their actuality. *Expressive* and *narrative texts* are categorised into this type. They are written to express subjective emotions, feelings, and thoughts of the authors. Examples of these texts include literary works, biographies, short stories, novels, personal essays, letters, and many fiction writings. This type of text emphasizes the importance of authors over the texts' accuracy and actuality of the message. The last is *reader-oriented texts* which are written to impact directly on the readers' changes. They include *directive*, *argumentative*, and *vocative texts* which are written to guide, influence, and persuade the readers. The examples are many, such as advertisements, legal documents, user manuals, political speeches, argumentative essays, and publicity materials (brochure, promotion media, company profile, leaflet, etc).

For translators, translation process cannot be well-executed without understanding of the text type, purposes, and its characteristics. Particularly, decisions on what translation approach and strategy to take will be dependent on the text type. Translating *a reader-oriented text* such as advertisement, brochure, and other publicity materials will require a different approach from that of *author-oriented text* such as a short story and novel. Publicity materials are usually characterised by the prominence of messages to be communicated effectively to impact on the readers' behaviour. The best way of communicating the message to the readers is essential undermining the objectiveness of the message. Thus, communicative translation approach will be needed to guide the translation process. On the other hand, a short story is signified by unique and specific message and language representing the unique characteristics of the author. It does not matter whether the content fulfils scientific merit or not, what matters more is that it expresses the genuineness of the author's subjectiveness and imagination which may contribute to preserving some aspects of the social, cultural, and historical values. In translating this type of text, semantic translation approach will be needed.

Translating *a content-oriented text* such as an academic textbook will require a different approach from that of *the two others*. Academic textbooks are usually characterised by the prominence of scientific merit or objectiveness of the message or content written by the authors. The author's intellectuality is essential in corroborating theoretical frameworks and selecting particular scientific criteria against subjectiveness of mind. Thus, faithful translation approach, but not too literal, will be useful to guide the translation process while trying to preserve the accuracy of the message.

Recognizing the text type will give the translators visionary input on what to achieve in a translation task; given a particular text to be translated. However, the challenge of translators is always related to the issue of equivalence. Since translation preserves meaning, while meaning is always semiotically (dependent on signs, images, texts) and contextually embedded, the notion of equivalence becomes a rich arena of discussion in which the translators struggle for the best translation. In intralingual translation, a

translator struggle for reproducing message that is equivalent in meaning in the same language. In intralingual translation, a successful translation is a translation that has an equivalence between the source and target texts. It can be its lexical (wording), textual (grammar, style), and contextual.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has provided a summary of what is translation, types of translation, text and meaning, and text types. While this is intended to provide a common ground on translation practice for implementing translation project in academic setting, this is practical for those who are interested in translation works outside the academic contexts.

This paper shows that translation theory and practice are underpinned by how we see language. Classical theories of translation portray the influence of structuralism in linguistics which restricts translation activity within the linguistics agenda (e.g. Jakobson, Catford, Nida, and Newmark, and others). In further development, translation theories have been studied by theorists from decade to decade which results in variations such as the idea of humanism, critical view, and ecological approach to translation. Since the view of language varies from structuralism, critical perspective, humanism, to the ecological approach, translation theories and their praxis can vary depending on how we see language. Within the plethora of translation theories, the challenge for today's translation is whether to rescript their translation tasks within the linguistics area, or following the views which advance translation beyond the linguistics elements.

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