



Damanhur University
Faculty of Arts
Department of English Language and Literature

TRANSLATION THEORIES

- **4th Year (Language Section)**
- **To continue ...**
 - **Lecture 6**

Outline

- Functional Theories
- The background and development of the functional theories
- Basic theories or concepts from functional translation theories
- Skopos theory
 - a) Skopos rule
 - b) Coherence rule
 - c) Fidelity rule.
- References

Functional Theories

The background and development of the functional theories

- “Functionalism” means focusing on the function of texts and translation.
- Functionalism is a broad term for various theories that approach translation in this way. Functionalist approaches to translation were invented in the early twentieth century in Germany.
- German functionalism plays a major role in the history of translation. But it did not appear overnight.

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- Functionalist approaches to translation were developed in Germany by a number of German translators in the late 1970s. However throughout its history, functionalism has its roots in early translation practice, especially in literary or Bible translation.
 - In the west, as indicated in the previous lecture, linguistics was a major discipline of the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that translation theories emphasizing linguistic equivalence were authoritative and exerted great influence at that time.

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- However, in the 1960s, due to the profound influence of the discipline of linguistics, translation study was regarded as a science and became linguistically oriented. Many definitions of translation emphasized the linguistic aspect. These definitions also shared something in common, i.e. viewing translation as a code-switching operation. (Newmark,1998:40)
 - In a sense, translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language (TL) the closest natural equivalent of the source-language (SL) message (Nida & Taber, 1969:12).

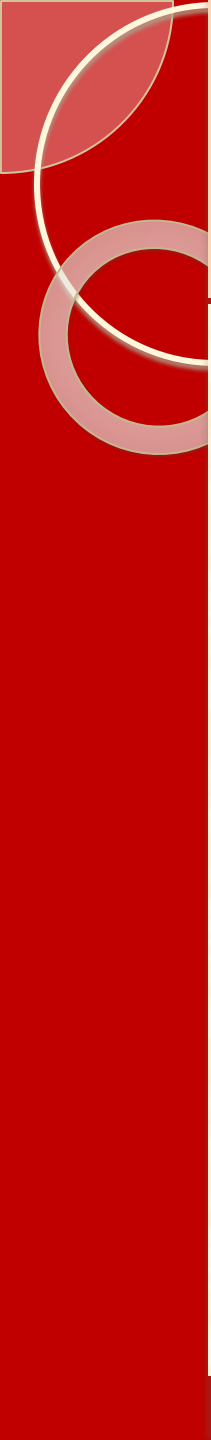
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- For this equivalence-based approach, the emphasis is on the faithfulness or equivalence of the target text (TT) to the source text (ST). The original text has an absolute privilege over the translated text.
 - Such a linguistic perspective undoubtedly had its merits. But at the same time, its demerits obvious reveal.
 - In translation practice, it was found that there were cases when word-for-word fidelity to the source text was not desired. This is because translation is not strictly limited to linguistic points and the linguistic equivalence is often not a prerequisite for the translation of informative texts such as technical reports, news, business documents and instructions.

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- To sum up, such an equivalence-based linguistic approach still focuses on the source text (ST), according to which the characteristics of the source text must be preserved in the target text (TT) and the TT must be equivalent to the ST.
 - However, equivalence can not solve all the translation problems. In many translation efforts, translators encounter many cases in which functional matters take precedence over the normal standard of equivalence, especially at the information age beginning from the 1970s.

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- Linguistics-oriented theorists did some adjustments in their own approaches, but seemed to cause more disorders. Thus, it was necessary to call for a new theory which could explore translation studies from an alternative perspective.
 - The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a shift from the static linguistic typologies of translation and the emergence, in Germany, of a **functionalist and communicative approach to the analysis of translation.**

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- According to Nord (1991:28), although the Functionalist Approach marks the importance of the TT, it does not neglect the importance of the ST and highlights its importance for the production of a TT that is highly accepted by the target readership.
 - In this vein, Nord reinforces that in the Western culture, two points are particularly expected from a TT: “functionality of the TT but also loyalty towards the ST sender and his intention”.

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- Moreover, Nord (1991) points out that being 'loyal' in Functionalist terms means to be in tune with the ST intention, and not simply with the structure of the ST. Each text must have a different function, but the translator must be loyal to its intention, adapting the structure of the TT to a different function (skopos).
 - Functionalist approaches generally believe that the function of a text in the target culture determines the method of translation. They emphasize the importance of the target text as the goal of the translational process.



Basic Theories or Concepts from Functional Translation Theory

The background and the development of functional translation theory has been introduced in the previous section. In the following sections, some basic theories or concepts from functional translation theories will be introduced.

1. Skopos Theory

- Functionalism is a broad term for various theories that approach translation based on the function of texts.
- The most popular among the functionalist approaches is the what we call **‘the Skopos theory’**.
- The Skopos theory, originating in Germany, has two major leading exponents, one was Hans J. Vermeer in an earlier time and the other was Christiane Nord, at the later time.

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- “Skopos” is a Greek word for “purpose, intent, goal, aim and function”.
 - In Vermeer’s point of view, any form of translational action must be conceived as an action, and any action has an aim or a purpose.
 - Vermeer argues that the ST is produced for a situation in the source culture which may not be the same in the target culture.
 - It then follows that the translation should be produced to suit the purpose for which it is needed in the target culture: ‘the ST is oriented towards, and is in any case bound to, the source culture (Vermeer, 1989: 229).

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- Thus, it is quite different from equivalence-based theories, where the source text is absolutely the yardstick and equivalence is the top principle. In functional theories, what theorists most concerned about is the purpose or the effect of the target text.
 - There are three guiding rules in the Skopos theory:
 - **a) Skopos rule**
 - **b) Coherence rule**
 - **c) Fidelity rule.**

a) Skopos Rule

- The top-ranking rule for any translations is the ‘Skopos rule’, which says that a translational action is determined by its Skopos; that is, ‘the end justifies the means’ (Reiss and Vermeer, 1984:101).
- It is not the source text that determines the translation process, but the prospective function or Skopos of the target text. This rule offers an answer to the question, that is, what is a good translation. Is it a free translation, a literal one or something else?

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- It depends on the purpose or typology for which the translation is needed, because the Skopos of a particular translation task may require a ‘free’ or a ‘faithful’ translation, or anything between these two extremes. In informative text, “free form, but faithful content” is important because message or information is more important than the format.

b) Coherence Rule

- This rule specifies that a translation should be acceptable in the sense that it is coherent with the receivers' situation (Reiss and Vermeer, 1984:113).
- In other words, translators should produce a text that is likely to be meaningful to the receiver of the target culture.

c) Fidelity Rule

- The third rule in the framework of the Skopos theory is the fidelity rule, or ‘intertextual coherence’ in Vermeer’s words, referring to the faithfulness of the target text to the source text.
- It means, the translation should be a representation of the source text at least in one of the aspects of content, form or effect.
- The important point is that intertextual coherence should exist between source and target text, while the form it takes depends both on the translator’s interpretation of the source text and on the translation Skopos.

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- In informative texts translation is generally a representation of the content of the source text.
 - These three rules are ordered according to their importance.
 - That is to say, the first concern of the translator is the purpose of a specific translation task rather than faithfulness to the source text. This is quite different from the other translation theories, which always advocate “faithfulness” and “equivalence”.

References

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Thank You

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