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SEMIOTICS ISSUES: SOME ASPECTS OF TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyze some aspects of translation based on the semiotic theory and to highlight the reciprocal relationship between semiotics and translation studies. Even if the topic mentioned here is no longer current, can the ideas on semiotic translation, text and discourse bring us back to pressing and necessary discussions on the translation process? This is the central question we try to address in this article. Our analysis includes providing reasons accounting for establishing a semiotic approach to translation, tackling the concept question on the arbitrariness of language and the instrument question on analysis structure. All these enable us to highlight the reciprocal relationship between these two disciplines.

Key words: semiotics; translation; arbitrariness of language; semiotic square.

1. Research context and conceptual framework

The relationship between semiotics[1] and traductology has been discussed several times in scientific work, among linguists and traductologists [7; 11; 12; 15]. Since the study of translation has found its place in the human sciences, several disciplines have examined the diversity and complexity of the questions it poses, by varying the points of view: not only linguistic, semiotic but also cultural, literary, sociological, media, etc. All these reflections make it possible to consider translation not only as a multidisciplinary object, but more specifically as a properly inter-semiotic activity: it makes sense, in fact, under multiple perspectives, but it is also necessary that this multiplicity of significations present itself, under conditions which remain to be specified, some global coherence. Our hypothesis is in this respect that the

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semiotic's point of view is likely to contribute to the establishment of these conditions.

The terms "semiotics" and "translation" that make up the title of our article are also the conceptual and methodological pivots that claim to allow us to develop a more theoretical reflection on interdisciplinary tendencies.

[1]Today, the distinction between *semiotics* and *semiology* is beginning to be noticed by the researchers but stops at the distinction between *the dyadic sign mode* of Saussure which opens the way to structuralism and *the triadic sign model* of Peirce represents post-structuralism and post-modernism. In our opinion, there are four aspects: 1) "sign" in the *representamen* of Peirce is material, *signifiant* of Saussure is psychological; 2) the *sign* in Peirce as a *sign-action*, as opposed to *sign-representamen*, for Peirce, when we speak of *sign-action*, that is, we speak of *semiosis process* - makes us think of the concept of *value* of Saussure; 3) *signifié* of Saussure equates to the *interpretant* of *the triadic sign model*, Peirce emphasizes that the *interpretant* is significant outcome of a sign [16, p.128].

When Ferdinand de Saussure evokes the notion of state of language, presenting it as one of the manifestations of the distinction between synchrony and diachrony, he indirectly formulates the problem we are trying to deal with here, namely that of the correlation between "the system of values considered in self" and "these same values considered as a function of time" [18, p.90]. The overcoming of a synchronic approach is

necessary without drifting exclusively towards a diachronic approach, just as unfit to offer us the encompassing vision that we will apply to our study. The orientation towards a semiotic approach to translation, capable of integrating the two dimensions identified, requires the setting up of specifically semiotic tools, which are capable of allowing us to take into account all the factors of the meaning of translation. By circumscribing the notion of linguistic community addressed by S-T and T- T^2, we want to develop the notions of arbitrary language in a contrastive way to analyze, later, the notion of semiotic square in a semiotic space. The definition of tools (semiotic square) allows us to access both the cohesive dimension and the coherent dimension of the original theory.

The Peircian approach has been exceptionally productive within the framework of the general theory of translation, determining a real progress in the definition of translation, seen as a particular form of *semiosis* or as a basis for a specific process of the generation of meaning, and especially specific in its recursion. As a semiosis process, in fact, translation is a signifying set that refers to another signifying set, through stages of progressive enrichment and development.

Before Saussure, translation does not pose theoretical problems. Everyone believed in the unity of

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^{2}Throughout our study we will borrow from translation studies the acronyms attested of S-T, to designate the source text and T-T to designate the target text, ie. the product of translation. Thus, in our analysis, S-L is for the source language, T-L is for the target language.

the human spirit, the words indicated things, the words were the same for all, and to translate, one just needed to know the words in different languages, which in different languages designate the same things. Saussure's thinking changed all this: the notion of a system, the idea that a sign is defined by its place relative to the other signs of language, that the vertical relation of signs to things is determined by the lateral

relationship of the signs between them, all this would theoretically render translation - a transition from one system to another.

2. Three questions on the semiotics of translation

2.1. Why a semiotic approach to translation?

The most common concept of semiotics is "Semiotics is the study of signs" [3, p.2; 4, p.3; 5, p.222]. This concept was essentially inspired by Saussure's conception: "It is possible to conceive a science that studies the life of symbols at the heart of social activity; it will be part of social psychology, and therefore of general psychology; we will call it semiology" [18, p.65]. The reason why it should be relevant to translation research (and practice) appears to be self-evident: when we translate or analyse translations we work with the material of sign. To translate is always a practical experience of the possibility of communicating, and the proper human communication consists of responding to signs by other signs.

The most common definition of translation which considers that translation is the passage of a message from a source language to a target language does not imply that it is a phenomenon only linguistic. In any case, the conception of Jakobson leaves no doubt:

(1) Intralingual translation, or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.

(2) Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.

(3) Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems [9, p.138].

Interlingual translation, which interests us here, is defined by Jakobson as the interpretation of source linguistic signs by other target linguistic signs. This idea is key. Bassnett-McGuire [1, p.80] argues that interlingual translation gives the translator more freedom for the translator because it is "bound to reflect the translator's own creative interpretation of the SL [source-language] text". The third type of Jakobson is "intersemiotic translation" or "transmutation". It is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal signs systems. In other words, it is the recodification of linguistic text

signs into non-linguistic codes. Gorlee [7, p.161] considers that Jakobson's interlingual translation mainly concerns "breaking up and dislocating familiar sign-structures and relationship between signs and with rearranging them meaningfully in the light of the new [target] system". Torop [19, p.272] criticizes Jakobson's intersemiotic approach because it complicates the comparison between the source text and the target text; as such, intersemiotic translation, according to Torop, increases the number of evaluation parameters of translation activity.

According to Saussure, we can conceive of the semiotics of translation. Since translation is a process of communication based on the linguistic sign to a considerable extent, the analysis of the problem of signification in translation must begin with the understanding and precision of the "semiological project" envisioned by Saussure in the preceding quotation [18, p.65]. The "sign", in the Saussurian sense, is not something that is simply substituted for another or replaces it. It is a link and a relationship of union between them. "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" - he says, that is, a "signified" and a "signifier" [18, p.66]. Moreover, the sign has two essential characteristics, the arbitrariness and the linearity of the signifier. In the Saussurian sense, signs are not abstractions; they are "concrete entities" studied by linguistics and which oppose each other in the mechanism of language. Saussure's conception of language gives a reason for a semiotic approach to translation.

Semiosis is one central concept in Peirce's thinking. According to Peirce, this is an unlimited semiotic process:

A sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which [it] itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum. [16 (2), p.303]:
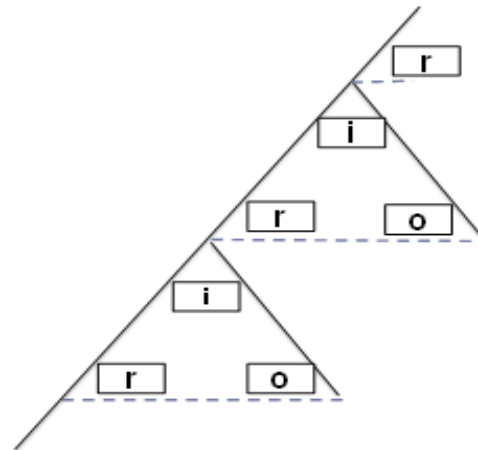

Figure 1. *Peirce's successive interpretants*

Legend: i: *interpretant* r: *representamen* o: *object*

This diagram explains that the process of decoding (read the sign) takes place with no end; the process of referring effected by the sign is infinite. According to Peirce, we can say, translation is interpreted by other texts in a semiotic chain indefinitive:
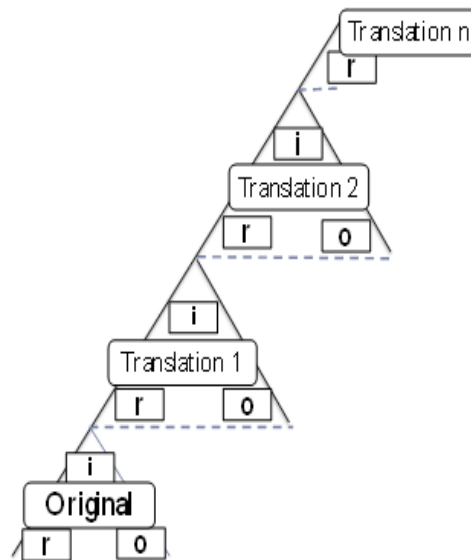

Figure 2. *Semiosis in translation*

The process of translation between two different written languages involves the translator changing the status in the S-L into the T-L. The S-T is signs that interpret other signs. The originals and translations are essentially like in semiotic terms.

To conclude, the semiotic approach to translation is favored for 4 reasons:

- First, the sign theory in Saussure gives a frame for the activity of translation: to translate a sign into another language is to create another signifier for the original signified. The meaning (value) of a sign appeared only in a sign system. The act of translating contributes to the variation of signification[3].

- Second, Peirce's theory "allows room for the study of both representation in cultures (a study of generals) and individual processes of interpretation (a study of tokens, which may well be types for any given individual but are not necessarily valued as such by the culture)" [17, p.393].

- Third, the semiotic approach to translation provides us with a tool to measure the validity of a translation both on the linguistic and the functional frameworks. This allows us to deal with interdisciplinary phenomena and to adapt both the translational and linguistic / cultural aspects [13, p.194]

- Finally, in the definition of translation (as a fundamental property of semiotic systems), Greimas insists on exceeding the S-T at T-T, creating a theoretical framework that matches signification to verbalization [8, p.65]. The signification is primarily an activity (or a translation operation), as a semiotic activity that the translation can be decomposed into an interpretative fact of the S-T, on the one hand, and a making producer of the T-T, on the other hand. In addition, this theoretical framework makes it possible to construct a metalanguage translation (that is, the language of translation studies).

[3]To explain the duality of signification and value, Saussure gives an example: if we cut a sheet of paper, we will have various pieces (A, B, C), each of them has a value compared to other pieces, but each of these pieces has a recto et a verso cut simultaneously (AA', B-B', CC'): that's the signification. It can be said that semiosis is constituted by articulations, that is, the simultaneous cutting of thought and sound [18, p.52].

2.2. Semiotics of translation: the concept question on the arbitrariness of language

What is meant by the arbitrariness of language? In the current interpretation, we infer the following:

1. the division of the signifier (phonic, for example) is not determined by its substance,

2. the articulation of the signified is independent of the semantic substance,

3. the union of the signifier / the signified is not governed by any factor (natural, for example).

In part one (*General principles*) of *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure raises a categorical statement: *The Arbitrary Nature of the Sign*. The link that connects a given acoustic-image with a determined concept and imparts it a value of sign is radically arbitrary[4]. Thus the concept is not linked by any internal relationship with the sequence of sounds that forms the corresponding acoustic-image. This concept could just as easily be represented by any sequence of sounds: just think of the different languages. The sign is arbitrary, that is to say that the concept "sister" for example is not bound by any character, interior with the sequence of sounds / [sɪstər] / which forms the corresponding acoustic image:
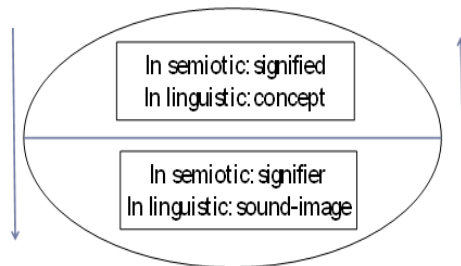

Figure 3. The Saussurian conception of the sign

Legend: The two elements of the sign are in a relationship of reciprocal evocation but arbitrary.

[4]"The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*" [18, p.67].

Indeed, human languages are arbitrary at four levels:

- At the signifying and signified level: each language selects a phonic frame in which it constructs all its words (the signifying level); each language selects what is relevant to the life of the human group, to present itself in a system of vocabulary (the signified level).

- At the arbitrary relation between the sounds which constitute the signifier of the word and the arbitrary signified that the sounds signify.

- Moreover, this characteristic is also at the lexical and grammatical level: the rule of morphology and syntax that the sequences of words must respect to construct the correct sentences. The order of words in a sentence of a language is arbitrary.

- Rhetorical-type levels: the inherent metaphor of each language, its own melody and its own rhythm which are produced by the succession of the sounds of the words (type of syllable, position of the tonic accents).

According to Saussure and our above analysis, translation is foremost arbitrary because semantic equivalence always represents an acceptable solution. It is also conventional in both semiotic senses, by reference or correspondence relation, and by semiotic calculation of meaning or equivalence. The arbitrary aspect of the translation is explained by the fact that, for the same linguistic unit of S-T, there are always several linguistic units in T-T to translate this unit. In order for the relation between the different possible translations to be arbitrary, they must have essentially the same meaning, and if this is not the case, their differences of meaning must at least be neutralized.

The example of the translation of "enseignement" in French which is translated in practice by "teaching", "education" and "lesson" in English, even if "teaching" is the most generally accepted solution. Arbitrariness of translation is inspired by the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign according to which, as demonstrated by Benveniste [2, p.52], the same object of the real world, or the same referent should be specified, is in exclusive semiotic relation with each of the different linguistic signs which belong to different languages. Since linguistic arbitrariness results from the consideration of other languages, the translative arbitrariness results from the consideration of other translations. The relation that lies at the heart of the translative arbitrariness is that which exists among different linguistic units of the T-L compared to others.

The stylistic devices are the results of certain lexical combinations in certain syntactic structures. These stylistic devices are often divided into two large classes: the speech figures which concern the level of the signifier (paronym, homoeoteleute, etc.) and the figures of thought which concern the level of the signifier (litote, metaphor, etc.). The lexicon and syntax are arbitrary, the translation of the figures of style poses problems for the translator of the verbal language.

2.3. Semiotics of translation: the instrument question on analysis structure

By applying semiotics to the analysis of interdisciplinary fields, we see that the semiotic square model of Greimas is the process of developing semiotics as a tool. It represents the constitution of a significant system from a given opposition, a conceptual set and a visual representation of this set. Greimas' model is often defined as the coherent representation of an opposition and allows to detail the analysis of the opposition by constituting opposing elementary binary terms into several elements. The opposite position A / B is a number of classes of analysis (analytic classes): from 2-sided opposition (like *life / death*) to 4 sides (eg, A, B, no A, no B: *life, death, life - death, not life - not death)*. The original element can be divided into 4, 8, 10 elements. Greimas presents the structure of meaning of these sets of categories as follows:
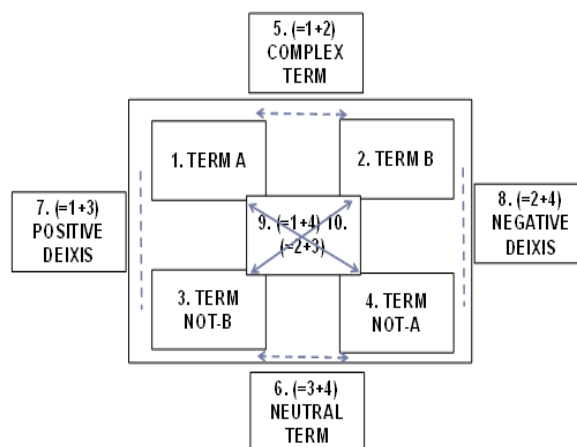

Figure 4. Greimas' structure of the semiotic square

Legend: The + sign links the terms that are combined to make up a metaterm

The signification comes from the shaping of the seme and the relationship between them. The

relationship between A and B is contrariety. The relationship between A and non-B, B and non-A is complementarity. The relation between A and non-A, B and non-B is contradictory. A and B signify "presence", while non-A and non-B signify "absence". Position 5 (combination of A and B) is a complex category. Position 6 (combination of non-A and non-B) belongs to the neutral category. Position 7 (a combination of 1 and 3) is the presence of deixis. Position 8 (a combination of 2 and 4) is the absence of deixis. Positions 9 and 10 are a combination of contradictory relationships of 1, 4, 2, and 3. There are many analysis applications from Greimas' successful model [6; 10]. The studies listed above have captured the most important element of the semiotic square structure, i.e. the developed elements fall within the scope of the text, signs and not actual values. The semiotic square perspective means that it has created the basis of metasemiotics and is no longer simply a means of expressing values based on opposites.

In the Greimassian semiotics, the simple and abstract components, defining the immanent meaning of the object of study, as well as the minimal relations that these components maintain between them, are united in the semiotic square. Following the semiotic square of Greimas [8, p.133-155], every value is defined in relation to its opposite value: in this perspective, equivalence and difference constitute the minimum and opposite values of a semantic category of the semiotic square of the translation[5]:
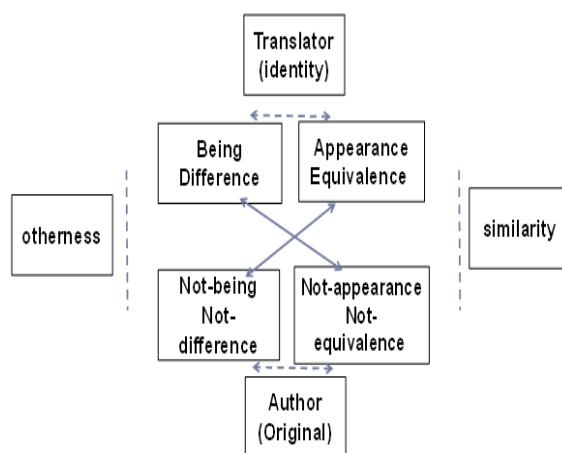

Figure 5. *The semiotic square of translation*

Legend: The + sign links the terms that are combined to make up a metaterm.

In this square, the term *translator* indicates the identity of a subject. It is equivalent to a second term *author*, non-identity:

- Identity can be the setting of the cultural target, T-L, the translation activity.

- Non-identity can be part of the original culture, S-T, creative activity.

The translation activity is composed by the other terms between "being" and "appearance". When the translator performs a T-T in a T-L, the solutions are always in a frame of equivalence or difference, the translator is reflected by these two fields, namely linguistics and culture. The contrariety relationship (between two languages / cultures of S-L and T-L), complementarity (the solution of the activity of translating when the translator encounters problems of language and culture), contradictory (arbitrary cases that we have shown above - 2.2.), presence - absence (S-T presented by T-T and T-T presented by S-T). This gives the values of S-T and T-T[6].

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[5]The notion *equivalence* coexists with its opposite term, the *difference* is analyzed by Roman Jakobson, See: Jakobson, Roman (1959/2004).

[6]Once again, this aspect clarifies the meaning of the concept of "value" that Saussure presented in *Course in General Linguistics*.

In fact, term A and term B, non-A and non-B in the semiotic square always remain within the framework of *equivalence* and the constitution of these terms carries out the mission of transfer. We know that *equivalence* and *transfer* strategies are at the heart of translative reflections[7]. The term "equivalence" that we take to finish our question here is analyzed by Vinay and Darbelnet's [21, p.20]. According to him, translation is the 'replacement of textual material in one language (SL [source language]) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL [target language]). Jakobson [9, p.139] believes that translation has a process of recoding that implies two equivalent messages in two different codes. This allows us to highlight the reciprocal relationship between semiotics and traductology.

3. Conclusions and perspectives

This subject of our study is part of a semiotic approach to translation. It consists of three parts dealing respectively with a methodological approach and a monographic reading of the theory of semiotics and translation. This article is devoted to the problems and strategies of semiotics related to the translation (the case of the verbal language) especially in matter of conceptual question and instrumental question. Using models of the semiotics of translation, we have proposed a discussion based on the hypothesis of the arbitrary characteristic of language and the notion of semiotic square, which allow the complexification of meaning to be represented and increase the value of the context of social and cultural signification. This research path on the one hand can constitute resources that allow the translator to solve difficulties; but on the

other hand, the models of the semiotics of translation collide with several methodical obstacles to surmount: The first is related to the levels of discourse, inter-discourse and metadiscourse: How does semiosis apply in this line? The second concerns the risk of simplifying semiotics, that is to say, to consider semiotics as simple technical guide of the translator to establish strategies, or to revise the text of arrival or even to analyze the translated text. Meanwhile, the aim of semiotic translation research is to characterize the process of signification where "les traducteurs ne sont pas des peseurs de mots, mais des peseurs d'âmes"[8] (Eco) [20].

The presentation of this problem can advance by articulating itself around the questions at the rhetorical level: are metaphor and metonymy in translation linguistic and / or cultural problems? What problems does the conceptual metaphor pose to the translator in the face of two distant cultural languages? Our past research has led us to consider translation as an analog perspective. The ideas of Ladmiral [14] make us want to advance in this line of research, in particular to justify its reasoning in the case of the translation of the text (the translation is not a figure of the analogy, but it provides us with a paradigm of analogy). The question of semiotics of translation also invites us to study in the framework of translation of a graphics language. This can help us clarify basic features such as sign duality, correlation and simultaneity in reception the text.

Semiotics is the study of the characteristics of signification. This process must first be understood when the signifier becomes an element of constitution of the sign (Saussure) or when the "functioning of sign" produces a characteristic of signification (Pierce). If the semiotics of Saussure emphasizes the relation of the signs and ideas that make the achievements of structural linguistics, Pierce's semiotics emphasizes the functioning

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[7]Gorlee (1994: 174-182) proposes the term "semiotic equivalence" which is based on Peirce's universal categories *of firstness, secondness* and *thirdness and* proposes three types of equivalence termed "qualitative equivalence", "referential equivalence" and "significational equivalence".

[8]"Translators are not weighers of words but weighers of spirit".

of the signs and the ideological foundation of behaviorism. So to speak, semiotics is both a constructive and genetic theory: a structure in the context of signification is based on difference and the moment when systems establish relationships: language is created as relational systems and not as sign systems; genetics in the context the signification is the result of a productive process with complex intersections, expressed in terms of depth or text surface levels. The genetic in semiotic are not similar in linguistics as they address all linguistic activities, semiosis processes, not just sentences or texts. This perspective undoubtedly creates new values for translation studies.

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VẤN ĐỀ KÝ HIỆU HỌC: MỘT SỐ KHÍA CẠNH VỀ DỊCH THUẬT

Tóm tắt: Mục đích của bài báo là nhằm phân tích một số khía cạnh của dịch thuật dựa trên lý thuyết ký hiệu học và làm sáng tỏ mối quan hệ qua lại giữa ký hiệu học và nghiên cứu dịch thuật. Ngay cả vấn đề đặt ra không còn mang tính thời sự thì tư tưởng về ký hiệu học dịch thuật, văn bản và diễn ngôn liệu có thể đưa chúng đến với những tranh luận cấp thiết về quá trình dịch không? Đây là câu hỏi trọng tâm mà chúng tôi đặt ra trong bài báo này. Quá trình phân tích của chúng tôi bao gồm: đưa ra các lý do cho việc xác lập cách tiếp cận ký hiệu học dịch thuật, vấn đề khái niệm khi bàn về tính võ đoán của ngôn ngữ và vấn đề công cụ khi bàn về cấu trúc phân tích. Những phân tích này cho phép chúng ta đặt ra tính hiển nhiên trong quan hệ qua lại giữa hai ngành khoa học này.

Từ khóa: ký hiệu học; dịch thuật; tính võ đoán của ngôn ngữ; hình vuông ký hiệu học.