The Importance of the Basic Philosophy Teaching within the Framework of the Translation of Philosophical Texts in Academic Translation Teaching

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to prove that the basic philosophy teaching on an academic level is compulsory in translation and interpretation departments by taking into account the challenges encountered in the translation of philosophical texts and besides the ways to solving them. At the end of their training, students in translation and interpretation departments cannot be expected to translate or interpret every sort of texts owing to the fact that the translation of every text requires specialized knowledge in different fields. Considering that the undergraduate may not gain an opportunity to be specialized at every field, it is sometimes impossible for him or her to understand the source text wholly and translate it to the target culture. As a natural consequence of what he/she has learnt during his/her training, the translator may compensate his/her lack of knowledge in ordinary texts with finding suitable equivalents in each culture. In other words, the translator can further develop his/her skills in the translation of ordinary texts after she/he has graduated from the department. However, in the translation of text types such philosophical ones encompassing an important part of a culture, both internalization and questioning are required other than finding accurate equivalents in source and target texts. This can only be achieved if students take the basic philosophy education. The fact that each course in translation and interpretation departments is offered by a different field specialist and the philosophy is regarded as an area of specialization make easily understanding of translation challenges encountered particularly in the translation of philosophical texts possible.

Keywords: Translation Teaching, Text Types, Philosophical Texts, Translation of Texts in Areas of Specialization

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1. Introduction

Training future scientists who contribute to scientific developments, establishing ground for theoretical studies, determining principles and procedures of translation teaching, studying the relationship between translation theories and practices and training translators who can conduct research on special fields such as medicine, literature and law are among the objectives of academic translation teaching (Intuitions providing academic translation teaching can have special targets.). In addition to these targets, one of the common objectives of nearly all the academic translation teaching institutions is to educate would-be translators who can initiate the translation process by using related translation strategies, justify this process within theoretical basis and meet needs for intercultural translation according to today’s requirements. In other words, one of the essential aims of academic translation teaching is providing translation competence for the translator candidates which is thought to be acquired later except the special abilities. In doing so, translator candidates are offered theoretical basis focusing first on translation practices. Then, they meet the need for translation activity based upon the assigned tasked and today’s requirements with the contribution of the translation competence which is acquired with this base. If they do so, they don’t have to acquire experience many years in places such as business settings in which translation needs are met. Because under normal conditions they have acquired translation competence at least to transfer the assigned source text to the target culture.

Translation competence is acquired with the academic translating teaching, which is the most important part of the translation process. According to Eruz, translation competence is defined as “meta competence” (Eruz, 2008:53). Translation competence also includes “language competence”, “cultural competence” and “textual competence” and so forth. The main objective of translation teaching is showing the necessity of background information instead of teaching how they translate in the format of vocational courses in terms of translation candidates. Kurultay claims that the objective of translation teaching is not the offer translation competence course within a specific practical field, instead defends a holistic point of view in the translation activity within its reality by taking into account translation candidates. The development of the ability of harmonization with conditions, the development of a comparative information and a certain awareness is impossible without theoretical bases. If a student asks “what’s the meaning of that?”, it means that student’s translation competence is still not formed. However if the student analyses communication processes in certain texts and proposes his/her translated equivalents with a logical reason, it means that he/she has a translation competence (1997:26).

As a translation activity is not only a process of transferring different linguistic codes, translation competence must be acquired in the teaching processes. Institutions providing academic translation teaching prepare their training curriculum by essentially taking into account the needs for translation and students are expected to acquire the translation competence in this direction. However when globalization processes in our rapidly changing modern societies are considered, increasing amount of translation fields and text types requiring specialization is observed. In these situations, teaching curriculum in institutions offering translation teaching is not adequate to meet translation meets. To meet translation needs, translator candidates must be specialized at certain fields and must know how to surmount translation challenges as well as acquiring the translation competence. This is only possible if the translation competence is offered in the education process and if highly equipped translator candidate can be raised. However would be translators must participate in the translation process with some skills. That’s why, according to Kurultay, translation teaching is not a language teaching and instead students joining translation teaching must at least know two different written and oral languages and at least must have a skill which helps him or her internalize two different cultural settings, translator candidates skills must also be enough for him/her to quantify himself/herself as a translator according to some approaches (1998:207-234).

2. Text Types and Philosophical Text as a Text Type

Translator candidates generally face different text types which belong to different fields in the academic translation teaching process and which have different characteristics of these fields. In the translation of these texts translator candidates learn the way how they can transfer source text to the target culture in the best way by using appropriate translation strategies and appropriate theories. Translation competence gains holism if would be translators learn how to overcome challenges in different text types.
Translation scholars have long emphasized different text types, features of these text types and the importance of categorizing texts according to their types. For instance German philosopher, theologian and hermeneutics scholar Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher detects text types and also translation strategies which are necessary in the translation of these text types on his research paper entitled “On the Different Methods of Translating” including Schleiermacher’s views of Translation after he had translated 5 volume Platon works which were translated between 1804-1811. Schleiermacher categorizes text types as “scientific and artistic” and “pragmatic” texts. According to Schleiermacher generalizing “scientific and artistic” and “pragmatic” text types as “oral” or “written” translation is not sufficient. Because both of this categories can be transferred into the target setting either in an “oral” or “written” translation. In business life, “speech” is controlled by “subject”. However in scientific and artistic productions the object is under the control of the speech, therefore the object is controlled by the impressions and views of the author. The subject will change according to the person uttering the speech and must have a polysemous structure. If the author does not add anything from himself or herself, the speech is useless. Communication is only possible with interpretation; vitality and development are possible in this way. In both of these text types, translation is still not mentioned. When the translation activity for the first text type is in question, translator in other words a person who transfers does not encounter a serious problem. Therefore the transfer in this text type is possible if the translator is to have a command of both languages at a certain level. However the translator who translates a text in the category of the second text type, he or she does not have advantages unlike the first category. In this situation, translator must rely on the creativity and the artistic talent. The creativity of the source text must also be achieved in the target text. In the first text type the author is in a passive position whereas in the second text type he or she is in an active position. Because of these reasons, for Schleiermacher the translation is essentially the transfer of scientific and artistic texts. At the top of scientific texts there are philosophical texts. However at the top of artistic texts are text types focused on humor (Kurultay, 1985:191-217). According to Heidegger, in the context of text types “translating a business letter is not the same as translating a poem” (Heidegger, 1997:145).

Categorizing texts into different types in the translation process is important in order to find the best translation approach and appropriate translation strategy; because every text has a specific feature in the field to which they belong and this features distinguish the text from other fields. Translator must be expert or in other words specialized at the field in which he or she translates. This must be acquired in the translation teaching process. Erzu states that a translator candidate can operate functional translation activity if he or she updates basic knowledge in such a fields as law apart from his/her knowledge in terms of translation theories and methods applied in the process of legal translation as a special field of translation activity (2008:219-220). Because accusations obtained in the education process will not be adequate in the translation of this text without receiving an education in a certain specialized field. Therefore translation programs supporting translator candidates for them to be specialized at a certain field in terms of today’s translation teaching are of increasingly importance.

Bykova categorizes philosophical texts from the all the other text types. Philosophical texts present the dimension regarding the content of the culture. Concepts are not empty forms. On the contrary, they have a certain structure in terms of semantic consistency. The translation of philosophical texts are not the retransfer from a language into another or it also does not defend the retransfer of units like forms or symbols that are formed according to certain rules and structures in the sources language (1993:249). Ree defending that most of the majority of the present philosophical terms are formed through translation states also that philosophical texts though offering in general an open idea are famous with their complexities. Philosophical texts include ambiguity and incomprehensibility especially for inexperienced readers. This uncertain and incomprehensible structure is like a hard puzzle. The mind of the reader gets confused as he or she reads the text. Just like climbers climb a challenging mountain, readers, feel desperate. In most of the cases, even though a heavy effort, feeling of failure appears. Although feeling of failure, there is a class still insisting on its fight in order not the feel themselves defeated. Translators are involved in this class by themselves. Because there are no any other options for translators to understand such texts in order to translate them. It is not possible to translate philosophical texts without understanding, interpreting and grasping the content and also without having knowledge of the period when such texts are translated especially in terms of
cultural elements. This of course requires translators to gather information about the source texts author and his/her period other than the text to be translated before the translation process begins. After understanding the text, they pass on to the translation process using translation strategies within the framework of mainstream translation theories and they also make decisions in the translation process.

Another feature characterizing philosophical texts from the others is that these texts have open-ended meanings concepts, and thoughts. Rival meanings, concepts and thoughts constantly compete with each other. By benefiting from various methods, philosophers try the transfer the contents of the text which are hard to understand for the inexperienced readers in the beginning. For example, according to Ree, direct dialogues as of Platon have been used in philosophical texts and also techniques regarding drama have been employed. Nowadays modern philosophers use more complex narration methods. Among them are also autobiographical and daily text types (2001:226-227).

Philosophical texts, as stated above, have challenging features forcing the inexperienced readers in terms of content and concepts dominant in this field. When a translator wants to translate these uncertain structures which are composed of contents and the concepts from a language into another, he or she has to analyze the structures. Because concepts (in the selection of words) in the philosophical texts are not coincidentally formed. Instead, they are logically and consciously gathered collections and translator has to understand such collections and interpret them. Therefore, as stated by Eruz for the field of law (2008:219-220), translator has to receive an education at least for basic concepts in philosophy as a field of specialization during the education process and therefore it has to have the ability to understand these concepts. In this way the translator can overcome specific translation problems that can be faced in the translation process.

3. Philosophy and the Translation of Philosophical Texts as a Specialized Field

Philosophical text are the collections of meaning and concepts which can be challenging for all the readers in terms of the content and this type of texts have an open-ended structure. This structure is transferred to the reader with special methods applied by philosophers. At the same time when these texts are read by readers without interpreting in detail, they lose their feature as a whole. With these characteristics, philosophical texts are different from other text types requiring specialization. In the translation of other text types in other fields, the translator’s background information may be enough in the translation process. However in philosophical texts, he/she translator has to deal with the source text as a normal reader. In order to be able to transfer the text to a different culture, he or she has, however, to be able to interpret the text deeply. In addition, he or she must understand specific narration techniques the philosopher uses in his or her writing. Only in this way can the translator understand the whole text.

Most of the translation scholars and philosophers attached special importance to the translator’s ability to interpret in the translation of the philosophical texts. According to Feher (1993:269) and Apostolopoulou (1993:246-247), discussions on translation regarding the philosophical texts are made within the framework of hermeneutics. Ree (2001:224) and Dostal (1993:256) state that especially philosophical texts cannot be present without interpretation. Heidegger also describes every translation as an “interpretation” (2002:178). On the other hand according to Gadamer, translator must translate what he or she understands from the source texts in the contexts of target reader. Like Heidegger, Gadamer describes every translation as an “interpretation”, but he also states that the content must not change, instead must be understood in a new language world (1999:387-388).

The translation of philosophical texts can be seen as an activity to philosophize essentially realized by translation scholars. In other words, the translator is a translation scholar and therefore uses special methods in the translation field during the translation process. He or she has a philosopher identity because he or she translates and interprets the philosophical text in a way which is understandable to the reader. In this context Bykova, describes the translation of philosophical texts as a result of a serious philosophical research (1993:250). According to Bykova who asserts that the translation of philosophical texts is not simply a transfer from a language into another and also it’s not a retransfer of the units like forms, symbols and so on which are created according to certain rules and structures in the source language. In the translation of philosophical texts, the translator has to transfer the content of the source text achieved by the philosopher into the target setting in a similar way. In other words the available logic and semantic content within the world of thought included by the text must be constructed in a new semantic world in other words in the target culture. In the new construction process, expressions and concepts of a philosopher in his or her own language must take place in the target culture without losing their meanings. The translator must be
skillful enough to complete this process. The basic difficulty in the translation of philosophical texts is not caused by
the necessity to have basic linguistics knowledge in both of the languages but especially caused by the necessity to
have hermeneutic and philosophical intuitions. Translator should, so to say, live the text and recode the content of
the source text in his/her own language completely. In other words facts in the source text must be thought in the
target text similarly. Hence the translation activity is performed as it should be (1993:249).

Like Bykova, Sándor characterizes the translation of philosophical texts from other text types. The translations of
philosophical texts have their own specific intentions. A philosophical text always asks questions to the reader and
accordingly to the translator. The solution belonging to the translator achieving the function can be taken into
account as a single possible solution of the questions asked through the text. All the questions cannot be replied in a
holistic way. No translation can be expected to create solutions in an ultimate way, which makes all people happy
(2001:258).

At first glance, one can think that transferring philosophical concepts to another language is not challenging.
However when such concepts as “ethics”, “idealism”, “materialism” are considered, another supposition can be true
(see Ree, 2001:228). Above explanations transferring opinions of various philosophers on translated texts can gain a
concreteness by giving example from “Being and Time” written by Martin Heidegger, one of the forerunners of the
existentialist philosophers dealing with a concept known as “Dasein”, mostly discussed both in translation studies
and in philosophy. In the studies conducted on the translation of philosophical texts, generally examples are given
from Heidegger’s concept of “Dasein” along with his translations (see Sándor, 2001; Ree, 2001; Feher, 1993;
Bykova, 1993; Smith, 1993). Ree finds it insufficient to seek equivalents for the Heidegger’s concept of “Dasein” by
translators in the target culture; in the target culture, none of the translations can give the equivalent Heidegger’s
classic of “Dasein” as long as translators insist on finding equivalents for Heidegger’s concept of “Dasein”. Even
Heidegger himself refilled his concept to recount his thoughts. From this statement it can be said that “Dasein”
Heidegger uses in his book might have a different meaning from its colloquial use in German. Therefore, translators
in general as a decision maker transfer “Dasein” to the target culture as it is in the original (Ree, 2001:232; Sándor,
2001: 200).

In addition, the fact that the translator translates “Dasein” as it is in the original or finds equivalents for this
concept in the target culture relies on his translation method within his translation competence and the type of the
target audience. What is important here is that the translator as a reader has a level to understand “Dasein” and also
has a level to interpret the concept in the target culture whether he or she translates “Dasein” as it is in the original
or finds equivalents for the term in question in the target culture. Such a level requires a large background and is
only possible if the translator receives an education as a translation scholar in the field of philosophy together with
the translation teaching. In other words, this can be achieved with a basic philosophy teaching through translating
process.

In the translations of philosophical texts, one can face translation problems more different than the example
regarding Heidegger’s concept of “Dasein”. For instance the problems encountered by translators can differ from
language to language. Ohashi emphasizes that some of the concepts which are planned to be translated for Far East
cultures (which have very different world views) are not available in the target culture (Ohashi, 1993:290-292). On
the other hand, translating Kant’s terms who derives terms from Latin and Greek in his own thought system can be
problematic in the translation process (see Dostal, 1993:257). Because concepts used in philosophical texts can only
have a special meaning in the text they are used.

According to Ricœur, the translation of translation works differs from translation problems faced in the
translation process. Some of these problems cannot even be overcome. Because semantic fields in both of the
languages never overlap. This translation problem reaches climax in basic concepts. Because the translator translates
only to seem to be translating by using a colloquial target language to find equivalents for the source texts concepts
in the target culture. If this is true of special terms and the translator goes on his or her translations to seem to be
translating, the functionality of the translation in the target culture becomes useless (2008:12).
4. Conclusion

In the academic translation teaching, the basic objective is the acquisition of translation competence for translation candidates. A student/translation candidate acquiring translation competence at the end of the education process has established a theoretical basis in translation studies and initiate the translation process using translation method and the translation process is kept in this way.

The student during the academic translation teaching faces different text types while he or she is acquiring translation competence. He or she learns how he or she can analyze the text type under a certain specialized field with a proper translation approach and can initiate the translation process with a proper translation strategy. As can be understood from this statement, texts or most of them translator candidates face in the process in which he or she acquires translation competence are the field texts requiring specialization. Even if the translator completes his or her translation teaching process, when he or she faces texts requiring special field knowledge can face translation problems for them hard to overcome if they do not have a basic knowledge in that field. To prevent such problems from occurring can only be possible if translator candidates internalize basic knowledge related with that specialized field in addition to acquiring in the education process. In the globalization process in which we live the increasing amount of specialized fields are clearly observed. Therefore, specialized fields in translation teaching must be offered especially for translation candidates.

In this context, philosophical texts have a more special position than other text types in translating teaching process. Because before translating philosophical texts, they need to be understood and interpreted considering background information. Philosophical texts have uncertain structures in terms of contents and concepts. Without analyzing structures and observing the period in which the structure was found, transferring them to the different culture is highly difficult and even sometimes it can be impossible or even if they are transferred, they become incomprehensible in the target culture.

Without receiving basic philosophy courses during translating teaching process, a translator whether he or she is equipped or not, will read the text like a normal reader; however as he or she did not acquire the ability to interpret and evaluate the text within the teaching process, he or she will face insurmountable translation problems. The best way to overcome the problems is to offer basic information in the field of philosophy to translation candidates during the academic translation teaching. Such translation programs are already provided in academic translation institutions having many departments on different specialized fields.

To sum up it is understood that challenges faced by in the translation of philosophical texts are overcome if the philosophy is offered to the students as a specialized field. The topic to offer basic philosophy courses to students in translation studies and the offered translation methods to realize this can be differently discussed and different solutions to the problems can be created.

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