Breaking Away from Traditional Translation Teaching in Arab Academic Settings

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Abstract

The age-long debate on traditional issues in translation studies has been unduly perpetuated despite recent advancements in translation studies advocating functionalist/interactional approaches to translation in the early eighties and onwards (Reiss, 1977, 1989; Mantari 1990, Vermeer, 1989, Nord 1997, among others).

The debate on such issues namely as translation as an art, skill or science, translation as product versus process, the free vs. literal translation dichotomy etc, will never lead us in the business of translator training anywhere. For one thing, the debate has never grasped the grass roots of the translating act comprising the translator's mediation between ST and TT, the paper and function of the translating act, the translator trainees' strategies, the brief, etc. Furthermore, the debate has always been swayed from the core to the periphery by improvised impromptu discussions of a more personal nature; thus, it has been totally neglectful of the main objective of translation pedagogy: the acquisition of translation competence as the core issue (i.e. bilingual competence, transfer competence, strategic competence, professional competence).

This paper seeks to establish a more systematic approach to translation pedagogy, translation assessment and research in the Arab world translator training context guided by the premise that translation is a communicative transaction taking place in a social network (Hatim & Mason, 1990).

To this end, the paper will offer a thorough review of the research that has been carried out so far on translation in the Arab context. It will assess that brand of research as a purely linguistically-based static model or a functionally-oriented model that takes into consideration the pragmatic and socio-cultural contextual variables.

Specifically, the paper will allocate specific areas of research that are more reflective of the true nature of translation and translating but have remained outside the scope of the readily carried out research. Thus, the paper will draw attention to the direction of current research as to whether it is on the right track or not.
To place properly the research carried out on English/Arabic/English translation issues, to gauge its relevance to translation studies and to channel it properly are essential requirements of this self-revelation process that should be undertaken by concerned researchers and translation teachers in the Arab World context. However, this in itself can be only a stepping stone to a fresh and realistic vision of the whole issue of an informed and informing model of translation teaching.

The author will take things further by presenting a three-dimensional model for a better understanding of the true nature of translation and the whole business of translator training in academic settings in the Arab world context. The proposed model consists of three basic components: a rubric of translation descriptors to inform and guide the teaching/learning process, a rubric of translation assessment of trainees' performance during and after training (i.e. a holistic and analytic grading model) and finally a rubric for matching up the descriptors with the parallel translation sub-competencies.

The author's proposed model with its tripartite structure leaves no room for personal impressionistic views on translator training. The model is deeply rooted in the translator trainee's literacy and his/her linguistic and cultural background, translation competencies (PACTE, 2000) as the ultimate objective of all translation teaching, and the social-cultural parameters governing the process of decision-making, revising and editing as correlates of the processes of translating and translation.