Translation Dichotomies: Much Ado about Something

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ABSTRACT

The age-long discussion of the nature of translation activity has been mainly dwelling since the Roman times of Cicero and Horace on whether the translator should opt for ‘word-for-word’ or ‘sense-for-sense’ translation. A close look at this dichotomy indicates that the two methods of translation derive from different disciplines. On the one hand, the word-for-word approach has its roots in linguistics and philosophy, namely in structural and semantic correspondences, where one-to-one correspondence among the items in the structural and semantic systems of any pair of languages is assumed to play a key role in translation activity. On the other hand, the sense-for-sense approach frees itself from linguistic constraints involving form and denotation in favor of a more functional perspective that has its roots in sociology and psychology (mainly viewing language as psycho-social behavior). It is argued in this paper that recent translation dichotomies including Formal vs. Dynamic equivalence, Formal vs. Textual equivalence, Overt vs. Covert translation, Semantic vs. Communicative translation, Direct vs. Indirect translation, Foreignization vs. Domestication and s-mode vs. i-mode translation are mere ramifications of the classical polemics.