



## **Communication and Translation: The Search for an Interface**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the dependence of translation theories on other disciplines, especially communication. It argues that translation theories cannot be developed in isolation and are bound to borrow from related disciplines such as linguistic, psychology, cultural anthropology and more especially communication. A high degree of compatibility and complementariness do exist between communication and translation theories. This paper attempts to come up with a double flow model of communication and translation, hinging on this affinity between the two disciplines. The two-flow model the paper proposes is a merging of intralingual communication from the original source to the first receivers (of the source culture) to which the translator either belongs or with which he is versed and interlingual communication from the translator to the second set of receivers – the receivers from the target language culture.

**Key Words:** Communication theories, Translation Theories.

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a technology, translation depends on a good number of disciplines among which feature linguistics, cultural anthropology, psychology, neurophysiology and communication. It is recognized that contemporary translation theoreticians have had the tendency of borrowing concepts from

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these disciplines, especially communication, to “superimpose them on translation” (Ajunwa, 95; Nida, 21). Robert de Retine’s definition of the discipline as a communication act, aptly illustrates this tendency. Robert de Retine concedes that translation is “*un acte de communication qui permet à un auteur de passer un message à un récepteur qui ne parle pas la même langue à travers un traducteur*. [a communication process which enables an author to transmit, through a translator, a message to a receptor who speaks a different language] (My Translation)” (6). Like many other definitions of translation, this submission shows the incorporation of key communication concepts in defining the discipline. It relatively presents translation as a process imbedded in communication or a type of communication on its own.

Similarly, Ukoyen views translation as the process of transmitting ideas and information by writing from one language to another (15). His definition equally establishes the dependence of translation theorization on communication or the interrelatedness of the two disciplines. It has been argued that such a dependence is one, if not the principal reason for the lack of adequate theoretical treatments of translation (Nida, 21). Ajunwa observes that

As an academic discipline, translation is yet to evolve an internally acceptable and streamlined terminology necessary for the discussion of the subject. At the moment, what happens is that most contemporary translation theoreticians go on borrowing concepts from other disciplines, especially the fields of linguistics and philosophy, and applying them in translation. I do not think that this is the best way of formulating practice oriented theories of translation. (95)

Based on this observation (the prominence of a terminology problem in translation theorization), some theoreticians advocate for an evolvement of translation theories in the course of translation operation and not with respect to phenomena in other fields of studies; meanwhile a counter school of thought views the dependence of translation to other as inevitable. This paper attempts to situate translation in some communication theories and measure the level of dependence of translation theories on communication. It equally aims at providing a model of communication which will clearly feature the translation process.

### **The Place of Translation/the Translator in the Process of Communication**

Communication can simplistically be defined as the process of sending and receiving messages. As just indicated, this definition is just simplistic as the process is a more complex construct with over four perspectives. As reflected in some communication models, one can regard the communication process as transportation (physically exchange of information); as a semiotic system; as a ritual and as a conversation. Soukup observes that this different

perspectives of communication marked particular period of the history of communication theorization. He posits that,

Early communication theory, following a kind of transportation model, fosters a view of fidelity that favors a sense of equivalence – something that can be measure. Later, communication theory followed a more ritualistic view and asked what communicators do with communication: in this view, fidelity becomes more functional. Yet another approach sees communication as a manifestation of semiotic systems, In this view, fidelity manifests surface changes in deeper structure [...] Finally, an interactive approach places communication as conversational system; here fidelity takes on a different value – more a characteristic of the audience than the text. (219)

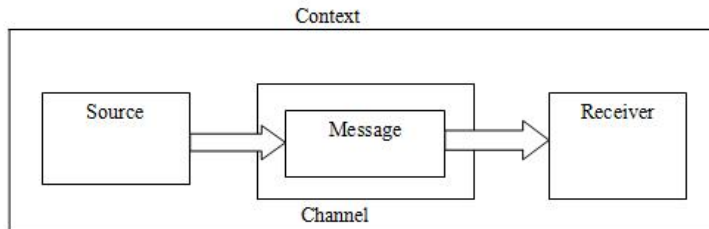
In this paper we will focus principally on the first perspective, that is, communication as a transportation (exchange of ideas) as this model aptly highlights what occurs in the transfer of a message from one place and one language to another and clearly shows places in which there might undergo some modifications due to the system of transportation. The model gives ample insight into the process of communication as it adequately defines the relations between source and receiver and their differences and dependencies. Models falling within the transportation category include, Shannon and Weaver's mathematical approach to communication and information and Deutsch theory of communication among others. In their assessment of the aforementioned theories and models, Champika et al, opine that from the perspective of social science, two main points can be taken from this model to adequately explain the process of information/knowledge transfer.

First, is that a knowledge (information) transfer process has two main components, i.e. the source or sender that shares the knowledge [information], and the receiver who acquires the knowledge. Secondly, knowledge transfer, although looks simple, due to various perspectives, factors and contextual issues surrounding the process. (8)

Generally, speaking, model of the transportation category involve a sender, an encoding system, a message/messages, a medium/channel, a context/setting, a decoding system, a receptor/receiver, and a feedback system as illustrated in Figure 1. It can be observed that theories in communication visibly do not provide space for translation or for the translator, despite the purported classification by some linguists of translation into linguistics which tends to imbibe communication. The non inclusion of translation into communication models may be justified by the fact that communication theoreticians tend to consider it as a pure intra-lingual process meanwhile translation is circumstantially viewed as intra-lingual, inter-lingual and inter-semiotic and involving transcoding, which visibly do not

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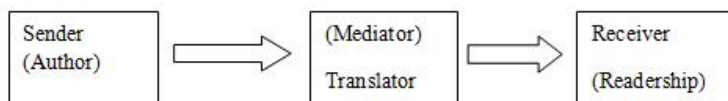
feature in communication theories or in theorician's models of communication.



**Figure 1:** Transportation model of communication.

It may therefore be interesting to know where to situate translation or the translator in the process of communication: can it be considered a separate communication process or a micro communication within a macro communication process?

Inserting translation in a one flow process of communication could be a challenging or futile task for any theoreticians. One may think of the audience as the place where to situate the translator, but the fact that the message is hardly if not never, theoretically destined particularly to the translator, discards such a conception. Fagbohun presents the translator as a second sender who relays the message of the original author and, who has his own audience/public which theoretically is different from the main author's public. Fagbohun concedes that the translator is "*un simple médiateur entre l'émetteur (l'écrivain) et le récepteur (le lecteur) [...] son public n'est pas le même que celui de l'écrivain (l'émetteur)*. [He is simply a mediator who stands between the sender (the writer) and the receiver (the reader) [...] his public is not that of the writer] (My Translation)" (22-23). In the same vein, Soukup asserts that "we could regard translation as an intermediate process. A message source creates a message and transmits it through a medium (the translator) who in turn sends it on to the receiver." (221). Based on Fagbohun and Soukup's conceptions of the translator, we may design the following communication model (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** A one Flow Translation model.

Such a model however ignores some vital communication components as the medium, the encoding/decoding and feedback systems. This may perhaps suggests that there is a level of incompatibility between communication and translation at the level of modeling and therefore bring to the fore the thesis of a separate evolvement of translation theories.

### **Translation as a Process Separate From Communication**

A number of theoreticians advocate for a theorization of translation irrespective of any other discipline; that is, developing theories that will not borrow terminologies from other fields of study. This school of theoreticians insists on the need for an evolvement of an internationally acceptable and streamlined terminology that will facilitate discussion on the subject. Ajunwa opines that, theories engaging purely translation concepts would have greater applicability than those formulated with borrowed concepts from other disciplines. He opines that,

I strongly believe that translation theories should be allowed to evolve in the course of translation operations. There is no doubt that such theories would have more practical applications in translations than mere and vague theoretically abstract terminology borrowed from here and there and superimposed on translation. (95)

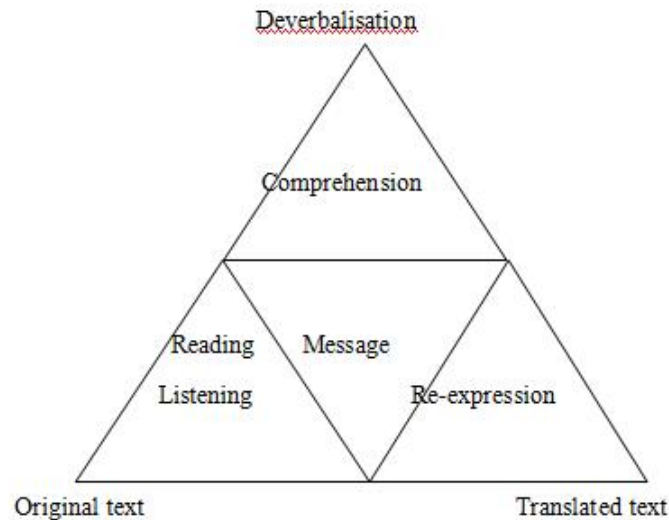
In line with this presuppositions, some authors have developed a conceptualization of translation which either ignores/excludes the communicative perspective of the practice or delineate it from the general process of communication. Komissarov for instance situates translation principally at the transcoding stage of an implied general communication process. He posits that,

The phenomenon of translation has to be looked upon from a dualistic point of view since the message (the context, the meaning) is first encoded (given form) in another language and then decoded (received, understood) and only than transcoded (given another form) into another language. It is here, in this process of transcoding, that the crux of translation is to be found because translation skill (translation art, craft), in my opinion, is nothing but the skill of matching the patterns of two different languages against the background of one and the same objective: extralinguistic reality structured differently by two given languages. (84)

Based on this, some translation theories tend to directly focus on the stages involved in the transcoding of the message from the source that is, comprehension, deverbalisation and re-expression. A good example may be Selescovitch and Lederer's interpretative theory which is based on a

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translational method of conference interpretation (Ladmiral, 82). This theory excludes the communication aspects of translation and focus seldom on the craft required and the stages involved in the process of translation. Gutu provides a model illustrating this theory thus (Figure 3):

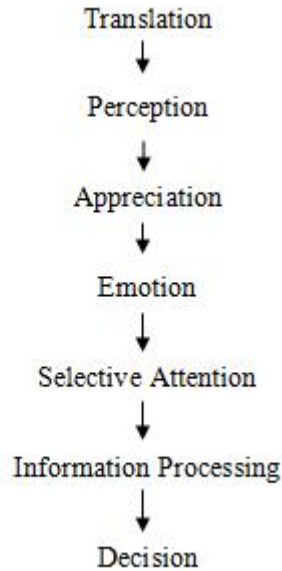


**Figure 3:** Interpretative Model.

Another serious example is the decisional model which presents the translation process as involving “an unending skein of choices” (Lander, 130). The choices by the translator occur at all the stages of translation and depend on translator’s personal value system and do not follow a rational analysis. As Durieux explains,

The translating process may be defined as a sequence of decisions, decision making is not the result of a purely rational reasoning relying on strict inference rules but the outcome of a mechanism governed by selective attention and controlled by emotion, hence situating the translating process between reason and emotion. (349)

Durieux conceives a decisional model of translation which, visibly, rather borrows from psychology and neurophysiology. The model comprises six steps and seven components as show below (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Decisional Model.

It may be considered questionable to dissociate the translating process from the communication chain since translation itself is more than a simple linguistic transcoding from one language to another. As posited by Vermeer cited in Kortsfleish, “it has become commonsense to integrate translation into a wider network of social relation” (561). Also, the translator is recognized to act as an intermediary in the communication chain. This suggests that translation theories or theorization is bound to borrow from other discipline, notably communication theories. Chapika et al regard translation and communication theories as compatible and complimentary for information transfer/transmission in many respects. They opine that,

Both the theory of communication and the theory of translation appear to be two different yet complementary theories for the area of knowledge [information] transfer. The former explains the behavioral side of knowledge (information) i.e. act of collaboration between the source and the receiver; whilst the latter sheds some lights on how to effectively transform knowledge (information) into usage form. (11)

This perhaps provides solid reasons to envisage the conception of a richer and more complex communication model that will incorporate and clearly

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schematize the translation process. A two-step flow communication model could aptly serve this purpose.

#### **A Two-Step Flow Model of Communication and Translation**

This model hinges on the fact that communication and translation theories are complimentary and have a considerable degree of compatibility and affinity. In *From one Language to Another*, Nida demonstrates that a translation approach may be based on the communication theory. He mentioned the importance of some basic elements in communication (source, message, receptor, feedback, noise, setting and medium) to be considered in translation. In *Theories of Translation*, he further mentions the communicative perspective as one of the four main orientations of a translation exercise. His observation suggests a merger of communication and translation. He asserts that,

The different ways in which people go about the task of interlingual communication can perhaps be best describe in terms of different perspective: (1) the source text, including its production, transmission, and history of interpretation, (2) the languages involved in restructuring the source-language messages involved in restructuring the source-language message into the receptor (or target) language, (3) the communicative events which constitute setting of the source message and the translated text and (4) the variety of codes involved in the respective communication events. These four different perspectives could be regarded as essentially philological, linguistic, communicative and sociosemiotic. (21)

The two-step flow model of communication and translation which we proposed situates translation in the second step of a complex process involving both an intra-lingual and an inter-lingual communication. It likewise situates the translator at the conjoining part/stage of the model. It therefore presents the translator as the element that makes possible the prolongation of the communication process, from the end of the intralingual communication to the inter-lingual one. This conception of the translator's role in the process of communication is in line with Soukup's assertion that the translator is both a medium and the initiator of the inter-lingual communication though the preponderance of the authority or power remains at the level of the origin – that is the source text-which acts as the unit of measurement of fidelity (221). Soukup opines that,

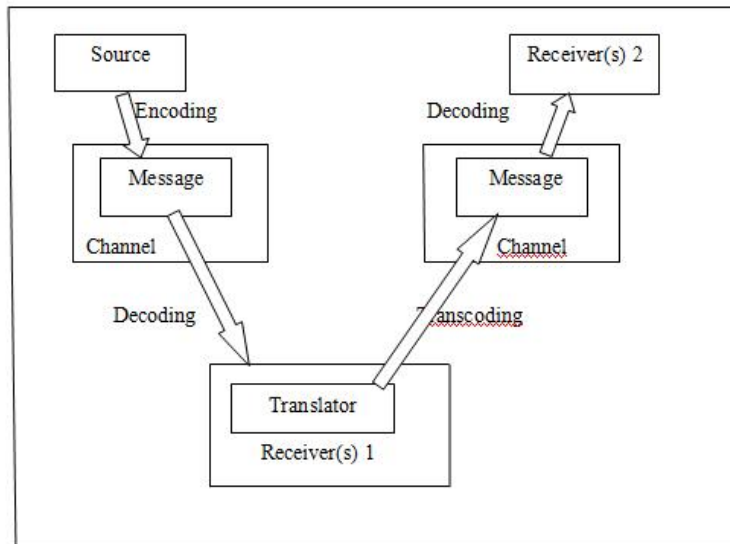
We could regard the translator as the creator of a new message, which reaches a receiver through some channel or other. In this instance, a double process of communication occurs: from the message source to the translator; from the translator to the



receiver. In each case, one theoretically could measure the message at each end of the process and compare the two. (221)

The translation process leads to the creation of a new message. The newness of the message is not in terms of meaning but rather in terms of language and presupposition (Larson, 3; Soukup, 221; Ekpeyong, 238). Larson posits that translation is basically indicated by a change in the form of the message from the source language to the target language (3). Despite this surface (structural) change of the source language message, the meaning (ideally) remains inviolable (not tempered with) to ensure respect of the principle of fidelity.

The communication process could stop at the transcoding of the source text message if the translation had no motivation. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the goal of translation, especially literary, scientific and technical is communication. The translator is most often motivated/pushed by the aim to share the result of his work with the target language audience, thus to use a medium (a publication for instance) to communicate results of his work to the public.



**Figure 5:** Two-Flow Model of Communication and Translation

## CONCLUSION

This paper argued that translation theories cannot developed in isolation and are bound to borrow from related discipline such as linguistic, psychology, cultural anthropology and more especially communication. A high degree of compatibility and complementariness do exist between translation and translation theories. This paper attempted to come up with a double flow model of communication and translation, hinging on this affinity between the two discipline. The two-flow model proposed in this paper attempts merging intralingual communication from the original source to the first receivers (of the source culture) to which the translator either belong or with which he is versed and interlingual communication from the translator to the second receiver – the receivers of the target language culture.

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