Approximative Theory of Translation: In Search of a New Central Concept

By
Omenohia, Douglas Umada (PhD)
Department of French and International Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt
Phone: 08038693438
E.mail: dougythebar@gmail.com

Nwankwo, Mercy I. (PhD)
Department of French and International Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt
Phone: 08030992303
E.mail: mercy.nwankwoeiaue.edu.ng@gmail.com
&
Douglas, Josiah Gogo-ogute (PhD)
Department of French and International Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt
Phone: 08051053843/07067287911
E.mail: josinteldouglas@gmail.com

Abstract

In this linguistic based communication, while determining the characteristics of Approximative Theory of translation, the researchers upheld the attested footprints that "translatology" is a science of message transfer from one linguistic landscape into another based on the *skopos* to which a source text is designed to fulfil in a target setting giving regard, among others, to the language level of the *destinataire*. This discourse equally sustained that the notion of fidelity in message transfer which has almost become the hallmark of contradictory dialectics can be mirrored from the horizon of relativity. However, for asserting within the spectrum of this enunciation, relativity implies that the valency of canons used as criteria of adequacy and acceptability of translated texts of a particular gender may not hold hard and fast in texts of divergent status and purpose. Eugene Albert Nida, in convergence, conceived translation as holistic *taxogramme* of communicative inquiry of discourse juxtaposition across language and cultural boundaries bearing dynamic and pragmatic

effect in true socio-semantic contour. It stands obvious that in the process of information transfer across different communication communities: linguistic, cultural, vocational, artistic, etc – "*loss and gain*" are sure phenomena even as situated meaning might be inferred and achieved. It is because of this perceived imperfection immanent in the process and in the product of translation that this paper in hand gave birth to Approximative Theory of translation. This is because either from cultural level or across linguistic levels, translation in its creative process is predicated by inquiry of nearest communicative equivalence. Therefore, every message transfer in translatorial science is a systematic or a methodical approximation. Hence, the emergence of the Approximative Theory of translation.

Key Concepts: Translation, Approximative Theory, Relativity of fidelity, Message transfer, Communicative equivalence.

Résumé

Dans cette communication basée sur la langue, tout en déterminant les caractéristiques de la Théorie Approximative de la traduction, les chercheurs ont maintenu les empreintes attestées selon lesquelles la traductologie est une science du transfert de message d'un paysage linguistique à un autre sur la base des *skopos* qu'un texte source est conçu pour remplir dans un cadre cible tenant compte, entre autres, du niveau de langue du *destinataire.* Ce discours a également soutenu que la notion de fidélité dans le transfert de message, qui est presque devenue le centre de la dialectique contradictoire, peut être reflétée à partir de l'horizon de la relativité. Cependant, pour affirmer dans le cadre de cette énonciation, la relativité implique que la valence des canons utilisés comme critères d'adéquation et d'acceptabilité des textes traduits d'un texte particulier peut ne pas tenir fermement dans des textes de statut et de but divergents. Eugene Albert Nida, en convergence, a conçu la traduction comme un *taxogramme* holistique de l'enquête communicative sur la juxtaposition du discours au-delà des frontières linguistiques et culturelles ayant un effet dynamique et pragmatique dans un véritable contour socio-sémantique. Il est évident que dans le processus de transfert d'informations entre différentes communautés de communication : linguistiques, culturelles, professionnelles, artistiques, etc. – « *les pertes et les gains* » sont des phénomènes incontournables, même si des significations situées

peuvent être déduites et atteintes. C'est en raison de cette imperfection perçue qui est immanente au processus et au produit de la traduction que cet article a donné naissance à la Théorie Approximative de la traduction. En effet, que ce soit au niveau culturel ou à travers les niveaux linguistiques, la traduction dans son processus créatif est fondée sur la recherche de l'équivalence communicative la plus proche. Par conséquent, tout transfert de message en science de la traduction est une approximation systématique ou méthodique. D'où l'émergence de la théorie approximative de la traduction.

Concepts clés : Traduction, Théorie approximative, Relativité de la fidélité, Transfert de message, Équivalence communicative.

Prologue

Things exist in significance by virtue of their affinity to other things which are unique in themselves and define the individuation of other elements. It is as my different personality gives a notion of uniqueness and identification to another person whose a particular characteristic vacuum is complemented by a manifest deposit in my attitude; and from his bias endowment I also draw some advantages which give meaning to my existence and social engagements.

This intimates that languages have their different structural characteristics. And one feature of a given language may comparatively suffice the lacuna in another in terms of stylistic comparison and message transfer. Undoubtedly, structural exactitude can hardly be found in two different languages, not even in dialects of one language. So it is in translation across different linguistic landscape or across two languages. In essence, translatorial task can be correctly perceived as a mutual juxtaposition of linguistic units or structures for interchange of meaning in a situation of communication between X and Y of language X and language Y, respectively. And to come to an acceptable ground of message transfer, it is all on the basis of conventional approximation. This approximation is necessitated by morphological and syntactical differences.

Thus, it is the rite of approximation that underlies a common semantic ground between two languages. Even in a technical (scientific) translation, words that are used to convey specialized phenomena do not often have sameness in lexical

composition in two working languages, they are only brought into systemic interchange to fulfil desired purposes in communication gap. In the field of translation, words, ideas, figured worlds, enunciations in written form are all approximative projections into another language in other to establish a target message meaning for a target audience. This is inevitable because language itself remains an arbitrary concept. It is in this regard that Douglas Robinson (2002) declared that: *"A useful way of thinking about translation and language is that translators don't translate words; they translate what people do with words"*
Translation is therefore more of establishing reality of anthropomorphic situations than upholding synonym of linguistic elements across languages.

Problem of the Research
In translation studies, theories abounds that are labelled in some seemingly elevated terms; like the hermeneutic theory of George Steiner, After Babel (1975); the Skopos theory of Hans Verneer (1970s); the interpretative theory of Lederer (1994); the theory of dynamic equivalence by Eugene, Albert Nida (1964). These theories of translation come under debate of understanding. Based on observed terminological problems that often beset understanding, the researchers therefore attempted a playway theory design with relatively popular and simple words drawn from the field of mathematical operations.

The second observation is that, often times, students of translation, including some resource persons consult the dictionary in order to determine the meaning of discourse unit in the target language. If the method is helpful in a little measure, it cannot be a commendable requirement for prospective career translators who works within time and space specifics. What translation requires is not updates of bi-lingual dictionary entries. But rather a continuous apprenticeship on intensive self-documentation which will bring the prospective vocational translators to fluidity and also to the frequency of near automatic linguistic and cultural juxtaposition of messages across language boundaries. In this order, the translator will do his work not in search for linguistic or literale sameness, but from the intelligent deposit of approximation, without sacrificing the (vouloir-dire), meanings and effects.

Objective of the Research

This research has as its objective to simplify the inherent theoretical myths in the learning and practice of translation. In Mathematics and Statistics, there are many "terminologies" that tend to estrange the learners, but the approximation concept in mathematical operations rather brings them closer to the activities of situational learning. It liberates from tension and commands voluntary attention. Similarly, Approximative approach to translation will create more animation in learning and in practice of translation. Lingual features and structures are not the same in any two languages, so this makes translation a trade of linguistic and cultural approximation based on the pragmatic intelligence of the intermediate communicator who ensures acceptable approximative juxtaposition, in creating the desired effect and meaning. This research focuses at motivating learners or students to see translation as rather easy than, sometimes, mystical and delicate, based on motivating approaches of instructors.

Definitions of Terms

The terms under this heading will be given subjective perception because of the general context of the article which attends to stand off from dogma and cliché.

Translation:

This has three layers of reference: it is a domain of study; a process of re-expressing textual messages across languages, or across different language levels of the same language to produce a second text in the target language it is also the use of linguistics signs to interpret symbolic or graphic images. The linguist, Roman Jakobson, respectively called them: inter-lingual, intra-lingual and inter-semiotic.

Roger, T. Bell (1991:13) outlined the phenomenon of translation in these sub-perspective relations:

i. Translating: the process (to translate; the activity rather than the tangible object)

ii. A translation: the product of the process of translating (ie. The translated text);

iii. Translation: the abstract concept which encompases both the process of translating and the product of that process.

Approximative Theory: Approximative is an adjectival derivation from the substantif "approximation". Theory is a collection of ideas that tend to serve as operational yardstick in a particular field of endeavour. Approximative theory in this context is thinking and doing translation by looking for close linguistic and cultural relationship to create a working significance and meaning in message transfer from one language into another.

Relativity of Fidelity: The underlined tenet of translation is formalistic and semantic coherence in texts. It is the operational correspondence of texts in translation practice that is referred to as fidelity. But since communication itself is far from being a perfect and faithful exchange of texts and utterances between interlocutors, the notion of fidelity in translation is therefore relative and dependent on certain formalistic, cultural, and divergent linguistic situations. And based on textual variations, **fidelity drift** becomes inevitable in the translation system. In other words, fidelity in translation is sustained on certain variables ranging from text type, language level of cible context, cultural figured world, etc.

Message Transfer: This simply goes beyond an attempt to communicate information from pole A to B. It is rather a discourse which satisfies attested professional functional standard in adequation and in acceptability.

Communicative Equivalence: This refers to an acceptable approximative relationship between a text and its re-expressed version. Communicative equivalence resides not in structural sameness but in acceptable associations of indices of linguistic items and cross-cultural symbols that make communication intelligibly accepted.

Approximation as Scientific Operational Procedure

The substantive, *approximation* is derived from Latin; ad-+ proximare, which means to come near (15^{c}); and this substantive is morphologically conditioned to generate the modifier *approximative*.

In mathematical operations, approximation rule is that which allows drawing or bringing together of quantity that is close in value to another, but not the same as a desired quantity (Mirriam Webster's 1990).

Emergence of Approximative Theory in Message Transfer

In theoretical term, this notion of approximation was first applied to literature in 2021 by Douglas, Josiah Gogo-ogute when he was working under the literary tutelage of Prof. Ante, James Eteka (Information fully captured in the database of Artificial Intelligence). The term was used as a deconstruction of Literary Realism. The theorist in his paper "Réalisme ou approxisme socio-existentiel…", postulated that all works of arts/literatures are social approximations. Thus the working designation should be ***Literary Approxism,*** which he treated with a good deal of logical dialectics. It is this notion of closeness of subjects, ideas, images, utterances that these researchers-Linguists now applied to the task of translation, upholding that the activity of translation as a scientific transfer of message is achieved by approximative effect because lexis and structures, even though may appear to be close, do not have sameness in two different languages. Translation is an intelligent juxtaposition of lexis and discourse units of two working languages in order to establish adequate and acceptable communication moving from source text to target text, and to the target audience. Translation does not operate on exactness, it rather operates on the approximation. It is to the frequently of this effect that George Steiner (1998) affirmed:

> *"il n'est pas deux lectures; pas deux traductions identiques"; "le travail de traduction est constant, toujour approximatif; "tout modèle de communication est en même temps un modele de traduction".*
> *There is no two readings, no two translations are identical, the work of translation is constant, always approximate every communication model is at the same time a translation model (notre traduction).*

This implies that the meaning of a text can be clearly communicated and presented in the understanding of the monolingual participants with unlimited and approximative openness, because the purpose of translation is to understanding

The Notion of Equivalence in Translation

Eugene Albert Nida (1964) sees translation operation as a search for closest equivalence, not sameness. And in the process, a shift or a loss may result, but intended meaning can still be derived. And this is why Susan Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 9-10) upheld that:

> *For there is no universal canon according to which texts may be assessed. There are whole sets of canons that shift and change and each text is involved in a continuing dialectical relationship with those sets. There can no more be the ultimate translation than there can be the ultimate poem or the ultimate novel, and any assessment of a translation can only be made by taking into account both the process of creating it and its function in a given context.*
> *Certes, il n'existe pas de critère universel selon lequel les texte seraient évalués. Il existe plusieurs critères qui changent et varient, et chaque texte est inclu dans une relation dialectique perpetuelle avec ces ensembles. Il ne peut pas plus y avoir de traduction ultime qu'il ne peut y avoir de poème ultime ou de roman ultime, et toute evaluation d'une traduction ne peut être faite qu'en prenant en compte à la fois le processus de création de celle-ci et la function dans un context pragmatique (notre traduction).*

Going further through the line, it can still be observed that translation is thus an imperfect type of communication just like other forms of interlocutions. This position was taken by Nida, sustained by Simpson, and absorbed by (I.E Iwunze, 2013):

> *Aucune communication, que ça soit intra lingue, inter-lingue ou intersémiotique ne peut être accomplice sans un peu de perte d'information… La perte d'information n'est qu' une partie du processus de communication, ainsi, on ne doit pas être supris que des pertes d'information, se voient dans la traduction, ce qui ne doit par d'ailleurs constituer le fondement dans la mise en doute de la théorie legitime de la traduction.*

> *Ranging from the level of intralingual, interlingual, and inter-semiotic, no communication can be accomplished without some percentage of loss of information. Loss of information is only part of the communication process; therefore, it should not be surprising that information losses are evident in translation, which should not form the tendency for negating the attested theory of translation (notre traduction).*

Drawing from these authorities cited above, it can be estimated that translation cannot have ultimate structure. Rather, shift and loss are normal conditions. And if it is insisted that translation should optimally be free from such loss of information, in that case it would not just be only in translation, but communication in general will become elusive if not impossible.

It is therefore in the absence of exactitude at both cultural and language level of signification that make translation a domain, a theoretical based task and a product of approximation.

This is also in consonance with the content episteme of Roger, T. Bell (6).

> *"It is apparent, and has been for a very long time indeed, that the ideal of total equivalence is a chimera. Languages are different from each other; they are different in form having distinct code and rules regulating the construction of grammatical stretches of language and these forms have different meanings. To shift from one language to another is, by definition, to alter the forms. Further, the contrasting forms convey meanings which cannot but fail to concide totally; there is no absolute synonymy between words in the same language, so why should anyone be surprised to discover a lack of synonymy between languages?"*
>
> *Il apparaît clairement, et cela depuis très longtemps, que l'idéal d'équivalence totale est une chimère. Les langues sont différents les une des autres, ils sont de forme différente, ont des codes et des règles distincts régissant la construction des tournure grammaticales du langage et ces formes ont des significations différentes. Passer d'une langue à une autre, c'est, par définition, modifier les structures. De plus, les formes contrastées véhiculent des significations qui ne peuvent que manquer de se concilier totalement; il n'existe pas de synonymie absolue entre les mots d'une même langue, alors pourquoi serait-on surpris d'identifier une lacune de synonymie entre les langues (notre traduction).*

This intertextual allusion is a further affirmation that translation in its holistic concept is constantly an enterprise of approximation. However, it should be characteristically indicated that approximative theory of translation operates, and can only operate favourably on the following texts types: legal texts, political texts, literary text, religious texts, because of its liberal method and flexibility tendency.

Characteristics of Approximative Theory of translation

> *And there is nothing that can be expressed in one language that cannot be expressed in any other. Obviously, one language may have terms not found in another language, but it is always possible to invent new terms to express what we mean: anything we can imagine or think, we can express in any human language (Akmajian et al, 2012:10).*
> *Il n'y a rien qui puisse être exprimé dans une langue qui ne puisse être exprimé dans une autre. Evidement, une langue peut avoir des termes introuvables dans une autre langue, mais il est toujours possible d'inventer de nouveaux termes pour exprimer ce que nous voulons dire : tout ce que nous pouvons imaginer ou penser, nous pouvons l'exprimer dans n'importe quelle langue naturelle (notre traduction).*

i. Characteristically, at the centre of the translation process is the trained communicator with dual dimensional linguistic dexterity enabling him to orchestrate written communication acts which are not only bound to be grammatical but equally stylistically and socially adequate and appropriately conveying in the vouloir-dire of the original (source) text. This is what Roget, T. Bell (1991:41) refers to as 'strategic competence'. It is a discourse performatory characteristic which makes the translator to be labeled as a communicator par excellence in relation to other language users. This affirmation reflects on the observation of Peter Newmark in his essay: "some notes on translation and translators" (Newmark, Delisle, 1984:39).

> *"Any old fool can learn a language if he has enough determination to do so. But it takes an intelligent person, to become a translator. And basically, his work is the measure of his intelligence"*

Therefore, it can be upheld that approximative approach of to translation demands visceral and fluidity in linguistics and cross-cultural intelligence.

ii. Apart from the linguistic and cultural competence of the translator, approximative approach to translation should ensure the conservation of all factual and intended information over the linear contour of lexical and syntagmatic unts.

iii. Approximative approach to translation should also ensures the cadence of sound moving from source language text to target language text. The translator should look out for an alluring landing melody effect, no matter the type of text involved, knowing that there are tonal relations among words, phrases, clauses, and sentences etc. This is because music and orchestra reside in the immanent background of being, beauty and essence, and should therefore be systematically dramatized in our communication; and at the same time conserving contextual denotation, connotation, and intention for the target audience.

iv Another major characteristics feature of approximative operation of translation, as earlier stated, is that, it would always function more effectively on the following text types: literary, religious, political, and forensic documents; and with more emphasis on contextual transfer than on the syntagmatics, because message meaning is embedded in the overall context, not just in morphological or syntactic units.

v. The enterprise of translation is governed by operational procédés as outlined by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1958:47-52) in their ***stylistique comparée du Français et de l'Anglais.*** And these procedures should be fully applied in their approximative approach to translating. However, apart from the seven fundamental translation formulae, there are other ensemble of them, which are equally attested, that make our translation more dialectically flexible and acceptable; such as: l'NDT, l'étoffement, la compensation, la suppression, l'explication, la periphrase, la coloration, l'inversion, l'économie, etc.

All translation theories have these procédés as working tools; and they will even be more productive in the approximative theory and application of translation.

Finalogue

Ideas, and images can be communicated to someone else only by means of language. And between monolingual communication participants, an intermediary service is required for mutual intelligibility. This is where translation and interpreting comes to the centre ground to make the monolingual parties understand each other. And this scientific task of translating and interpreting is done by linguistic and cultural approximation because no two languages have the same structures (morphological and syntactical); or two cultures are absolutely identical. So message transfer is done by conventional or acceptable approximation. The translator should be able to adequately measure the communicative distance between the *Spider of Ghana* and *Tortoise of Nigeria* in folklores and mythology when it comes to subject of craftiness and wisdom.

It is this notion of *almost exact; process of semantic estimation; coming close to something*, even though not in natural sciences or in mathematical operations, that incarnates the Approximative Theory of Translation. And in as much as translation is not an exercise of betraying linguistic or cultural elements, but of strategic communication, what obtains is mutual linguistique and cultural approximations for consummate operational outcome in satisfying the pragmatic intention of sender and receiver. It is the operational or systematic ***loss*** in source language text, and the substitutional ***gain*** in the target language text that would constitute a conventional acceptability of message transfer by approximative standard. Still on mutual ground of communication, terminological competence is a *prima facie* for the bilingual intermediary who can engage his linguistic knowledge of neology and neologisms to ensure that discourse between his monolingual clients is effected. The translator must also come to the realization that there is nothing which is discussed in one code that cannot be expressively configured in another via approximative fluidity and lexical creativity. This brings us back to the axiom that translation is essentially linguistics, because linguistic instrumentation is the routine of the translator's engagement.

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