DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

What is the contribution of discourse analysis to translation studies? Given that this volume is about linking discourse and translation, I want to preface the study to be reported in this article with a few general remarks about how I view the connection between discourse and translation. First of all, discourse analysis is a textual approach which sets out to elucidate the function(s) of an utterance due to its specific position in a text/discourse, or the function(s) of part of an utterance inside a larger unit. As in all text-linguistic approaches, the object of investigation is therefore twofold: looking at an utterance in (a certain) position and looking at how discourse is constructed by this utterance in combination with other utterances. An 'utterance' is here understood as the smallest unit of speech which starts with a pause and ends with a pause or a change of speaker, and is usually represented in written language by a clause.

Since translation is essentially a text-oriented endeavor, discourse analysis can make a very useful contribution to solving translational issues. In the literature, the terms 'text' and 'discourse' are often used interchangeably or with confusingly many different meanings. Text is often said to refer to a stretch of written language, discourse to spoken language. Widdowson's ideas seem most appropriate for clarifying the distinction between text and discourse. For him, text is a purposeful use of language; in a text, language is used with the intention of referring to something for some purpose; that is, texts are constructed to get messages across, express or explore ideas, get others to do things, and so on. This communicative purpose is the discourse underlying a text. In interpreting a text, readers, listeners and translators have to make the text a communicative reality by retrieving its meaning, that is, they have to interpret the text as discourse. The text is then, as it were, the linguistic trace in the speech or writing of a person's intended discourse. A discourse refers to the meaning a person intends to express when producing a text, which an addressee (and a translator) is then to interpret from the text.

Given that the function or purpose of a text has long been recognized as of prime importance in both translation theory and practice, the methodology provided by discourse analysis is highly relevant for translation. As an example, the current author's model of textual analysis, comparison and evaluation in translation is firmly based on using discourse analytic steps for determining the function of a text which may or may not be maintained in the process of translation. A branch of discourse analysis of obvious relevance to translation is contrastive discourse analysis.

Lastly, discourse analysis is also a performance-oriented approach to language. It examines language reality as it is, focusing on many phenomena which are not understood to be elements of competence. With the assumption that everything in language performance is meaningful in that it serves to express some function, discourse analysis even tends to collapse the dichotomy between langue/ parole or competence/performance. This time-honored dichotomy rests on the observation that there are always systematic (i.e., structurally recurring) and nonsystematic (i.e., randomly occurring) elements in speech. However, this assumption seems to break down because discourse analytic investigations show that there is nothing random left in performance, which means that discourse analysis must work (and does work) empirically in a very rigorous way.

- House, Juliane. 'Global English, Discourse and Translation. Linking Constructions in English and German Popular Science Texts'. Target. International Journal of Translation Studies, vol. 27, no. 3, 2015, pp. 370–386.

1. What is the primary focus of discourse analysis?

A) The structure of individual utterances

B) The interpretation of written texts

C) The grammatical features of spoken language

D) The function of an utterance in a larger unit

2. According to the essay, what is the difference between text and discourse?

A) Text refers to spoken language, while discourse refers to written language.

B) Text refers to a stretch of language, while discourse refers to its communicative purpose.

C) Text refers to the meaning of a person's intended discourse, while discourse refers to linguistic traces.

D) Text and discourse are used interchangeably and have the same meaning.

3. How is discourse analysis relevant to translation?

A) It helps determine the grammatical accuracy of a translation.

B) It provides methods for comparing and evaluating translated texts.

C) It focuses on individual speech elements and their interpretation.

D) It explores the structural elements of written language in translations.

4. What is the branch of discourse analysis relevant to translation called?

A) Textual analysis

B) Performance-oriented analysis

C) Contrastive discourse analysis

D) Structural discourse analysis

5. What is the assumption about language performance in discourse analysis?

A) Everything in performance serves a meaningful function.

B) Performance consists of randomly occurring elements.

C) Systematic elements are irrelevant in language analysis.

D) Performance cannot be analysed empirically.

Answer 1: D) The function of an utterance in a larger unit

Answer 2:B) Text refers to a stretch of language, while discourse refers to its communicative purpose.

Answer 3: B) It provides methods for comparing and evaluating translated texts.

Answer 4: C) Contrastive discourse analysis

Answer 5: A) Everything in performance serves a meaningful function