



## The Skopos Theory: A Heterogeneous Approach to Translation

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**Abstract:** No theory can address all the problems in the process of translation. No translation is a perfect translation. Newmark says that there is no perfect equivalence but degree of equivalence in a translation. Vermeer's Skopos theory considers all the factors of the translation process and orients us towards the phenomena that were not considered seriously in the traditionally defined and determined parameters of translation. This paper highlights various aspects of The Skopos theory.

**Keywords:** Translation, equivalence, Skopos Theory, Source Text, Target Text

### I. Introduction

Translation theorists have dealt with the problems of translation either emphasizing on the elements of Source Language Text (SLT) more or the Target Language Text (TLT). We can divide these theories as Source Language Text oriented theories and Target Language Text oriented theories. Source Language Text approach orients us regarding faithfulness to the Source Text (ST), strictly following the elements of ST whereas Target Language Text approach emphasizes on the acceptability, target readership, communicative aspect etc. Early translation theorists mostly concentrate on linguistic equivalence whereas the later theorists of 20<sup>th</sup> century start looking at translation from the communicative and functional point of view. These communicative and functional theories of translation seem to be more successful as compared to earlier and other theories. The Skopos theory is one of them that tries to address all the problems of translation process and gives an independent function to the target text. In Mary Snell Hornby's words, it is *indeed closer to the realities of translation practice*. The Skopos theory is more useful for the translators than the translation theorists. It has a heterogeneous approach which means it analyzes not only an aspect of translation process but many aspects of the same.

### II. Discussion

Traditionally, a translator searches a target language equivalent for a source language term. Generally he/she goes for word to word or sentence to sentence equivalent. This search mostly corresponds to the source language. Nida's formal equivalence and Catford's formal correspondence deal with establishing equivalents considering the source language item as the significant one. Such establishing equivalents is linguistic oriented which limit the fact that translation as an act of communication.

It is in seventies and eighties, a new approach towards translation emerged which started emphasizing on the equivalent function in translation. Katharina Reiss and Juliana House added the pragmatic aspect in the process of translation. They gave importance to both source language text and target language text; they stated that both should have the same function. A target text should have the same function as a source text is having on its readers. Such approach could not address the text types.

Gutt's Relevance theory looks at translation from communicative point of view. Target reader's expectation and needs became important for relevance theory. It argues that an utterance has a number of implications and the target reader or listener has to infer the right relevant implication and stop there. A target reader or user may not require all the information what is there in the source language text. But a translator is not a free agent to decide what is essential for the target readers. He/ she has to adhere to the guideline that is imposed on him/her either from a publisher or a government agency or a religious group etc. Relevance theory could not solve this problem.

On the line of communicative functional approach to translation, it is the Skopos theory (developed by Hans J Vermeer) that seems to be more successful in addressing the major problems in translation. "Skopos" is a Greek word which means purpose. The purpose determines the goal of any translation is the main tenet in the Skopos theory. It discards most of the source language text oriented views on translation.

Translation is a conscious planned activity that must have a purpose and this purpose determines what would be the equivalents, what would be the style, what would be the translation strategies, who would be the target readers, so on and so forth. Translation, as a phenomenon, does not happen, it is a human action like walking, throwing, speaking, writing, jumping. Human beings do translation which is a voluntary action. A translator wills to translate, desires to translate and intends to translate. Without willingness, desire and intention, one cannot translate. Vermeer emphasizes on the intentionality in the process of translation and makes action theory foundational to the Skopos theory. Intentionality is a psychical phenomenon which is very much a part of the translation and it exists in a translator's mind. If intentionality exists in a translation process, there must be a purpose. So the Skopos makes translation more subjective as intentional purpose is a human as well as a subjective phenomenon.

A translation is a process which involves selecting a source text, a source publisher, source author, target text, text type, selecting a translator, translator's voluntary translation activities (reading the source text, understanding it, finding out target equivalents, writing paragraph by paragraph, revising etc), translation tools like dictionaries, glossaries, target reader, a target publisher, editor, strategies, style, time, two societies, and two cultures, psychological states of author, publisher, editor and the translator so on and on. The Skopos theory brings all these external factors and internal factors of translation process together. *The Skopos theory accounts for different strategies in different situations, in which the source text is not the only factor involved.*" (Xiaoyan Du, A Brief Introduction to the Skopos Theory 2012,).

The Skopos theory delimits the act of translation from the traditionally defined notion of equivalence. The Skopos theory answers why an equivalent fits in a particular time and in a particular situation. *"In the framework of the Skopos theory, there are not such things as right or wrong, faithfulness or unfaithfulness, and the translation the Skopos decides the translation process.* (Xiaoyan Du, 2012).

The Skopos theory postulates the problems encountered while translating non-literary texts for government or non-government agencies, mostly commercial, scientific and technical translation. It adopts a prospective attitude to translation which means the Skopos should be worked out before doing translation.

In the Skopos theory, Vermeer talks about three rules: rule of the Skopos, coherence rule and fidelity rule. Rule of the Skopos has already been discussed that is the purpose of the target text determines the translation. Coherence rule makes the target text coherent so that the target readers can comprehend it where their background knowledge and circumstances are considered.

Producing the elements of the Source Text in the Target Text may be a Skopos but not the theSkopos. Fidelity to the Source Text has a Skopos and a target text free of the influence of the Source text has another Skopos. Likewise equivalence of function as stated by House may be one of many possible skopoi of a translation (Byrne, Jude, 2006). Nord also recognizes the same function of the Skopos. As Vermeer states it, the concept of the Skopos can not only be applied to a whole text but also the segments of the target text. Sometimes, a part of a text is translated differently than that of the other parts of the text. A particular technique may not be used as the translation technique while translating all the parts of a text.

Translation, as a process, as a product or as a function, is not a homogeneous entity. A text is woven around many heterogeneous elements. It may be cultural, may be social or may be political or something else. Translation as a book or product has many elements which matter for the publisher or agencies. Translation also functions as a text in the target language. Gideon Toury considers translation as "facts of target cultures". According to the Skopos theory, there is a purpose behind translation as a process, as a product and as a function. Skopos may make a translation product physically homogeneous but it is not only a physical book, it functions in a target language in a target world in a time and space. The Skopos redefines the position of the target text. A target text is not merely a static item decoded in a language, it is to be read by a target reader, it depends on target reader's reception and it has a relationship to the extra-linguistic situation in which it exists.

### III. Conclusion

From the various tenets of the Skopos theory, one can understand that it is applicable for non-literary translation like localization, technical documents, scientific texts, commercial and legal documents. It gives a dynamic heterogeneous approach to translation. It has freed the target text from the traditionally imposed notions of the source language text. It is one of the functional theories which values a target text based on the elements of target culture, target readers and the goals of the agencies. Elements of target text are determined by the Skopos of the translation of the same.

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