How Much “Translation” Is in Localization and Global Adaptation?
Exploring Complex Intersemiotic Action on the Grounds of Skopos Theory as a Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to contribute to the discourse by clarifying the extent to which complex intersemiotic action can still be regarded as translation. This will be shown by two of its major representatives (i.e., localization and [global] adaptation), both of which constitute contested issues in translation studies research with regard to their conceptual belonging. Functional translation theory will be employed to achieve this aim. Employing functional translation theory will show that the decisive criterion for the conceptual affiliation of any intersemiotic action to translation is whether or not it constitutes a predominantly language-based text-to-text transfer. Finally, given its successful implementation, this paper proposes functionalist skopos theory as one possible interdisciplinary methodological tool for intersemiotic action that is not only useful for translation studies but could also be useful, if accordingly adapted, for other neighboring disciplines, such as, for example, adaptation studies.

KEYWORDS

Adaptation Studies, Conceptual Categorization, Functional Translation Theory, Global Adaptation, Intersemiotics, Localization, Non-Textuality, Textuality, Translation Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that, given our (post-)global age and its technological advances, new forms and modes of intracultural and intralingual communication have emerged. The social media, the email, video-conferences, SMS, just to name a few, have been part of our everyday life since around the advent of the 21st century. New technologies and globalization have also brought about changes in intercultural and interlingual communication, especially in professional intercultural communication. In the latter context, and since the late 20th century, one of the most prominent new text types in everyday life has been that of ‘localization’. Additionally, a very interesting and frequent case of intersemiotic transfer in everyday life is the one of ‘adaptation’, which, though much older, is, nevertheless, fostered by globalization and new technological progress. In both cases, translation

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studies research has led to a contentious discussion with regard to whether they have to be regarded as translational actions or not. A short overview of these discussions will be presented here in later sections of this article. As such, this article seeks to contribute to the discourse by shedding more light on this issue by utilizing a theoretically founded methodological approach. We posit that this will assist in determining the compliance (or not) of localization and adaptation with translation.

As functional theory has explicitly pointed out, translation has to be regarded as a text-based activity: “The source unit of a translation is always a text” (Reiß & Vermeer, 2014, p. 108; Reiß & Vermeer, 1991, p. 120). This implies that both the process and the product of translational activity have to be text-based. However, as will be shown later on, both localization and adaptation seem to challenge the conventional notion of text. Given this hypothesis, it would be useful for the methodological and theoretical purvey that follows to have a reference point on a specific definition of ‘text’. This definition will comply with the functional approach implemented and is also generally accepted in translation studies. We therefore propose using a textpragmatic definition. Accordingly, a ‘text’ is “a (more or less) complex, functional unit of written or oral utterances with a specific content and communicative intention that fulfills a specific communicative function in a given situation” (Göpferich, 1995, p. 56). Though without explicit reference, this definition implies the potential additional use of other secondary means of language-based human communication, such as, tables, figures, images, symbols, paralanguage, kinesics, which may also be digital. However, wider semiotic entities with no common discursive orientation in everyday human communication, as for example any kind of movies/films, drawings, and music are not included.

As it will be shown later in this article (cf. 3.1 and 3.2), localization and adaptation are both characterized by a semiotic complexity which is due to its multimodality. Both these complex intersemiotic actions rely progressively on the dynamic replacement of linguistic modes, as, for example, on the replacement of verbal with non-verbal language and vice versa and/or on the replacement of verbal with also extralinguistic language (e.g., images, symbols) and the reverse. In addition, adaptation has many different conceptual manifestations (Bastin, 2011). Adaptation as ‘local adaptation’ is possible on the level of word or utterance, and is, as such, semiotically less complex. In contrast, adaptation in its ‘global’ form, known as ‘genre-switching’, consists of a more complex phenomenon. One can differentiate between two different types, the ‘reductive’ one and the ‘expansive’ one. In both cases, adaptation can be equated with a ‘changing of the text type’, which may also lead to a function that differs from that of the source text. Its reductive type refers to adapting, for example a novel into a children’s book or an Ancient Greek drama into a comic book (cf. Seel, 2015). Particularly extreme, however, are the semiotic transformations needed with regard to its expansive type which entails a shift of semiotic medium, such as from text to screen or from text to image and vice versa.

In view of this, the realization of both localization and adaptation entails progressive minor to major intertextual, intermodal and intermedial diversifications and transformations. Thus, it is clear that localization, and especially global adaptation as complex transfer actions, entails an explosive intersemiotic potential that challenges traditional text pragmatics as well as traditional translation theory. They do so, as they progressively seem to not comply with the textpragmatic definition of text and with what is conventionally assumed to be ‘translation proper’, that is, interlingual translation as an “interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language” in Jacobson’s sense (1959, p. 233).

In view of the above, the following research questions arise: How does localization and global adaptation as complex intersemiotic actions (and products) fit into the afore-mentioned textpragmatic definition, that is, to what extent can they be regarded as being text-based? And, hence, to what extent can they be regarded as translational actions (and products)? And, most importantly, do they both belong to the realms of translation studies or do they find their conceptual affiliation in other, neighboring disciplines, such as for example adaptation studies?4

Against this background, the overarching rationale of this paper is a translational one. Both localization as well as global adaptation as genre-switching seem to be conceptually positioned
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