

A Glossary of translation studies terms

<p>Competence: Currently popular term for the set of things that a professional knows (knowledge), is able to do (skills), and is able to do while adopting a certain relation to others (dispositions or attitudes). “Translator competence” would thus be the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become a translator. The concept can be reduced to just two components: declarative knowledge (“knowing that”) and operational knowledge (“knowing how”). As such, the term “competence” has very little to do with the way the same term was used in (Chomsky’s) linguistics to indicate a set of rules that underlie performance.</p>
<p>Consecutive interpreting: Oral translation of a speaker’s words into another language when the speaker has finished speaking or pauses for interpreting. More formal than ad hoc interpreting and used, for example in formal business meetings, for negotiations, training sessions or lectures.</p>
<p>Context :Information outside of the actual text that is essential for complete comprehension.</p>
<p>Cultural translation: Term with many different meanings, most of them equally vague and ideological. The general notion is that translation is not just of texts, but of entire cultural representations and identities. When an ethnographer describes a tribe, they thus translate a culture into the language of ethnography; museums offer iconic and linguistic translations of entire cultures; migrants translate themselves, forming cultural hybrids, and so on. Our general preference here is for a discipline focused on communication across different cultures and languages, rather than processes that occur within just one culture or language.</p>
<p>Culture: A word with notoriously numerous definitions, none of which can be wrong. One supposes that a culture comprises codifications seen as belonging to some people but not to others. It is difficult, however, to attempt to draw up lists of such codifications, and often hazardous to assume that they are specific to just one culture. A further problem is that some uses assume “national cultures”, where certain codes (dress, meals, hygiene, etc.) are believed to be associated with national languages. A more elegant approach is to let cultures define themselves, simply by positing that the limits of a culture are marked by the points in time and space where translations are required.</p>
<p>Descriptive vs. prescriptive Translation Studies: A deceptive opposition, necessary at the time when translation was being taught and studied on the basis of prescriptions of how to produce a “good” translation. Descriptive studies would then set out to reveal the nature of actual translations, showing that what is “good” depends on culturally relative norms. The opposition is deceptive because 1) the act of description is never free of value judgments (we describe only the aspects we are interested in, and thus are not entirely free from prescriptive intent), and 2) prescriptions are inevitably based on experience of actual translations (and thus on elements of description). One way to retain the distinction is to suggest, that prescriptions are in fact predictions of future success or failure, based on accumulated descriptive experience.</p>
<p>Domestication vs. foreignization: Version of the classical dichotomy between “two methods of translation” proposed by Schleiermacher (1813) and resurrected by Venuti (1995). When we try to organize translation shifts, the most obvious macro-approaches are domestication and foreignization in the sense that most shifts privilege either the target culture or the source culture. It might pay to think in terms of a horizontal axis of possible cultural worlds, with foreignization at one end and domestication at the other. Then there is a vertical axis of “amount of information given”, with omission at the bottom and pedagogical translation (explicitation, footnotes etc.) at the top. So all the solutions find a place in relation to those two axes.</p>
<p>Dubbing :Recording or replacement of voices commonly used in motion pictures and videos for which the recorded voices do not belong to the original actors or speakers and are in a different language.</p>
<p>Equivalence: A widespread term for a relation that many believe in and no one can prove beyond the level of terminology. We should accept that equivalence has no ontological foundation, since translation problems allow for more than one viable solution. This means that, in the field of translation problems thus defined, equivalence is always “belief in the translation as equivalent of an ST”.</p>

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<p>Interpreting vs. interpretation: Two terms for spoken mediation between languages. “Interpreting” began to replace “interpretation” in the 1990s, on the argument that it was slightly less likely to be mixed up with “interpretation” as the general making sense of texts.</p>
<p>Literal translation: Translation that closely adheres to the wording and construction of the source text. A literal translation of continuous text usually appears “stilted” and unnatural and is therefore to be avoided unless there is a specific reason for translating literally.</p>
<p>Literal translation: translation that closely adheres to the grammar and construction of the source text. A literal translation usually appears “stilted” and unnatural.</p>
<p>Machine translation (MT): Translation produced by a computer program or use of a translation program to translate text without human input in the actual translation process. The quality of machine-translated text, in terms of terminology, meaning and grammar, varies depending on the nature and complexity of the source text, but is never good enough for publication without extensive editing.</p>
<p>Natural equivalence: Deceptive term for the kind of equivalence that can be tested on the basis of back-translation. For example, “tomography” translates as “tomography”, which back-translates as “tomography”. This creates the illusion that equivalents exist in languages prior to the intervention of translations. The term is deceptive because these equivalents are almost always the result of technical or otherwise “artificial” languages.</p>
<p>Process vs. product research: A fundamental distinction between attempts to analyze the way people translate or interpret (i.e. their mental processes) and studies of their final translations or renditions (i.e. their products). The distinction makes sense against the background of methods that offer specific insight into processes (think-aloud protocols, eye-tracking, key-logging, interviews, potentially EEG mapping), and these methods do not assume product analysis. The distinction is nevertheless tenuous because there are many cases of overlap: when we have a series of intermediary products (e.g. draft translations), we can use them to infer process, and in the case of interpreting, products are perhaps still the clearest window on processes. The danger, however, is to assume that product analysis alone can give solid data on translation processes.</p>
<p>Product analysis: The analysis of what translators produce and exchange for value (money or prestige). The term is to be preferred to “text analysis” to the extent that texts also include interviews, TAPs, successive drafts, etc. Product analysis is broadly opposed to process analysis.</p>
<p>Shift: Observed difference between the two sides of a bitext. Shifts concern product analysis, not process studies, so they should not be seen as the sum of everything a translator does in order to produce an equivalent. The problem, of course, is that we cannot happily define what a “non-shift” might be, except as the idealist assumption of absolute equivalence. Nevertheless, the term “shift” is undeniably useful when analyzing products. It might be salvaged as follows: for each bitext we describe the relations that we tentatively accept as invariant (in order to save time, if nothing else), then we describe all remaining relations as “shifts”. Note that this does not assume that the term corresponds to any psychological reality on the part of the translator or the user of the translation.</p>
<p>Simultaneous interpreting : Oral translation of a speaker’s words into another language while the speaker is speaking. The interpreter usually sits in a booth and uses audio equipment.</p>
<p>Think Aloud Protocols (TAPs): Transcriptions of the words spoken by subjects as they perform a task, for example translators as they translate. This is one of the tools used in process research. The word “protocol” is used here in the sense of “written record”, as in the protocol of a treaty”. The term “talk aloud protocol” is sometimes used in experiments where subjects only describe the actions they are performing, and not the reasons.</p>
<p>Transliteration: Transforming text from one script to another, usually based on phonetic equivalences. For example, Russian text might be transliterated into the Latin script so that it can be pronounced by English speakers.</p>
<p>Visibility: Term popularized by Venuti’s 1995 critique of “the translator’s invisibility”. If we read a translation and are not aware of the fact that it is a translation, then the translator can be said to be “invisible”. For Venuti and the tradition of textual criticism, visibility would be associated with locating the translator’s voice in the text, or the translator disrupting the deceptively smooth flow of language. But visibility might also involve the presence of prefaces, translators’ notes and the translator’s name on the cover.</p>