
TRANSLATION STUDIES MEETS LINGUISTICS: PRE-STRUCTURALISM, STRUCTURALISM, POST-STRUCTURALISM

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ABSTRACT

Although the founding father of (European) structuralism was a linguist, apart from linguistics and philosophy its main tenets were applied chiefly to the literary strand of the discipline which is known today under the umbrella term of Translation Studies. The relationship between translation and linguistics has always been rather difficult, and at the end of the 1970's the shift from prescriptive to descriptive approaches did not make it any easier.

East European structuralist approaches to translation were developed within literature oriented theories, focusing mainly on poetics of literary translation. The original fascination with linguistic structuralism as possible foundation of "scientific" (or scientist?) translation theory soon gave way to disappointment: structural models and structuralist methodologies proved to be too limited to account for the intricacies of the translation process. The reaction was the "cultural turn" of the 1990's.

Paradoxically enough, linguistic post-structuralism in translation studies implies a more general "turn" towards pre-structuralist or traditional linguistic paradigms, with their emphasis on indeterminateness of non-objectivist meaning, on the role of motivation and of the cultural and social context. All these insights gain new significance within contemporary "post-structuralist" linguistic frameworks. In the last decades of the 20th century one such framework emerged, known under the umbrella term of Cognitive Linguistics. The relevance of CL for TS lies in its recognition of the role of human experience and cognition.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics; conceptualization; context; cultural turn; experience; motivation; non-objectivist meaning; pre-structuralism; post-structuralism; text linguistics

1. Introduction

In spite of its widely proclaimed (and well deserved) autonomy, the young discipline of Translation Studies (henceforth: TS) has never denied its debt to two neighbouring disciplines of a longer tradition: linguistics and literature. Yet in scholarly reflection on their mutual relations the latter seems to be much better represented than the former. In

the contemporary TS paradigm literary traditions figure more prominently than linguistic ones, as seen in the monographs and anthologies appearing recently on the market (in the Polish context, see e.g. Bukowski & Heydel 2012). It seems worthwhile to try and restore the proportions, as was doubtlessly realized by the organizers of the Prague conference, devoted to Czech, Slovak and Polish structuralist traditions in the TS paradigm. As is well known, structuralist frameworks were originally developed within the framework of theoretical linguistics; later they were transplanted to literary studies and found their way to TS. Prominent representatives of Polish pre-structuralist, structuralist and poststructuralist linguistics made an important contribution; it is to them that the present essay is a tribute.

Metaphorically, Polish linguistic tradition can be seen as a threefold spiral, with pre-structuralist insights reappearing in the more recent post-structuralist (cognitivist) paradigm and “structuralism proper” taking the middle position, informed by the former and informing the latter.

2. The four Polish “pre-structuralist pre-cognitivists”

2.1 Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929)

In 1884 de Courtenay wrote: “The essence of language is the way in which sound is combined with psychologically conditioned content” (de Courtenay 1884: 12, quoted in Urbańczyk 1993: 110).¹

In fact, this statement may well serve as a working definition of **psychologism** – the approach that prevailed in Polish linguistics of the first decades of the 20th century. Its advocates believed that linguistic investigation should be related to, or in a more extreme version founded upon, psychology. Although present in classical European structuralism (see below, section 3.1), the idea was anathema to proponents of the American version, especially the supporters of the transformational-generative theory initiated by Harris and propagated by Chomsky and his followers. Yet the postulate that “the first and most fundamental requirement of objective research is the conviction of psychological and sociological character of human language” (de Courtenay 1901: 21, quoted in Urbańczyk 1993: 110) has triumphantly come back, in a modernized form, as one of the basic tenets of all trends that are now developed within the approach known as “cognitive linguistics” (see section 5. below), which, in its turn, appears to become increasingly influential in the ST of today (cf. e.g. Hejwowski 2004).

2.2 Jan Rozwadowski (1867–1935)

In a series of articles written in the first two decades of the 20th century Jan Rozwadowski, one of the greatest Polish linguists of the time, repeatedly claimed that “language is a system of signs that cover human psychological life in its entirety; it is an external exponent of that life”, which “reflects the system of human reality” (1960: 218). The titles

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish sources are given in my own translation.

of his articles collected in a volume on “the phenomena and development of language” (*O zjawiskach i rozwoju języka*, 1950 [1921]), provide a perfect illustration of that claim: *Język jako wytwór kultury* (“Language as a product of culture”), *Językoznawstwo a język literacki* (“Linguistics and the language of literature”), *O poezji w języku* (“On poetry in language”).

Once again, the pre-structuralist linguistics of Rozwadowski are an augury of the “cultural turn” in both modern theories of language and in contemporary Translation Studies, as well as an argument for the claim that the traditional gap separating “literary” and “linguistic” translation theories should be levelled out. Rozwadowski’s metaphor of language as “a *sui generis* plastic wall on which culture makes its impression, that is, an interrelation between the subject (the human being) and the object (the world)” (1960: 226) is based upon the notion of subjectivity as an inherent property of human cognition. Conditioned by culture, the way in which things are “perceived and understood is different for different peoples and different nations” (1960 [1921]: 41). The interrelations between languages and cultures, the central position of the “human factor” and hence the subjectivity of the translator are core notions of both the cognitive theory of language and contemporary TS facing its two recent turns: the cultural and the creative (cf. Heydel 2013, part I).

2.3 Zenon Klemensiewicz (1891–1969)

Although focused upon descriptive syntax, the writings of Zenon Klemensiewicz are particularly relevant in view of their implications for contemporary TS. Among his early works one should mention pioneering analyses of individual styles, which are an insightful augury of methodologically consistent contemporary stylistic research (Klemensiewicz 1927). In a later text on “psychological interpretation of a grammatical sentence” he writes about “selectional decisions in using available all-nation potential of the linguistic syntactic system” (1969 [1952]: 79). What sounds like a paraphrase of Ronald Langacker’s definition of “alternate construal” (cf. e.g. Langacker 2008), can also be taken to define the crucial notion of today’s TS, i.e. the translator’s decision process. In turn, Klemensiewicz’s claim that the syntactic word order results from the “speaker’s attitude” and their particular point of view (1969 [1952]: 47) brings to mind the notion of salience, basic for both Langacker’s model of grammar and translation theorists’ pertinent notion of translation dominant (cf. Barańczak 2004).

Last but not least, Klemensiewicz’s claim that “generalizations need mass frequency calculations” (1969 [1952]: 93) forebodes empirical corpus-illustrated or corpus-based research on translation, as evident in later work on parallel texts and language corpora (cf. e.g. the works by Mona Baker; see e.g. Baker 1995) and computer-aided stylometry (cf. e.g. Rybicki 2012).

Significantly, Klemensiewicz’s research on syntactic structures of Polish was regularly combined with analyses of individual styles – one of the leitmotifs of his scholarly work and an aspect of language use that was in general neglected within the structuralist approach as a topic that went against the structuralist principles. Individual styles are discussed in his papers *Elementy składni w poezji* (“Syntactic elements in poetry”), *O niektórych właściwościach pisarskiego języka Marii Dąbrowskiej* (“On some character-

istics of the literary language of Maria Dąbrowska”), *O składni utworów Henryka Sienkiewicza* (“On the syntax in the works by Henryk Sienkiewicz”), *Garść uwag o słowotwórstwie Zegadłowicza powieściopisarza* (“Some remarks on word formation in the novels by Zegadłowicz”).

2.4 Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (1916–1995)

Wojtasiewicz, trained as a specialist in Chinese language and culture, was a theorist of language and a translator. He is rightly considered as the “father of Polish Translation Studies” (cf. Hejwowski 2013). As the author of *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia* (“An introduction to the theory of translation”), published in 1957, he went well ahead of his time. In the very year in which Chomsky published his *Syntactic Structures* – the first manifesto of the generative model of language – and several years before Nida proposed the opposition between formal and functional (dynamic) equivalence, Wojtasiewicz claimed that equivalence in translation is to be considered as a signal to evoke the same (or at least similar) set of associations. Unlike other scholars influenced by linguistic structuralism, Wojtasiewicz saw untranslatability as a function of cultural differences rather than systematic differences between languages. The “associations” that he wrote about were shown to run the full gamut from the individual to the general, thus foreboding the cognitivist notions of embodied encyclopaedic meaning. In direct reference to TS, his claims tally with the cultural turn and relate to Gideon Toury’s concept of descriptive norms.

3. Structuralism

3.1 Linguistics

The (official) beginning of (European) structuralism is usually taken to be the publication of de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1916. Its main tenets can be summarized as a set of well-known claims, recalled at this place for the readers’ convenience:

- in linguistic investigation *langue* should be differentiated from *parole*, with research focusing upon *langue*;
- language is defined as a system of (discrete) elements ordered according to (strict) rules;
- elements within structures can be replaced with other elements (i.e. slots in syntagms can be filled with items belonging to appropriate paradigms);
- the structure of language is inherently hierarchical, which implies methodological reductionism;
- in the structure of language, relations between elements are more important than the elements themselves;
- networks of relations between elements matter more than the characteristics of individual constitutive elements;
- investigating the structure “as it is at a given moment” does not involve the history of that structure (i.e. synchrony is to be separated from diachrony).

Early reactions of Polish scholars are aptly summarized by the opinion expressed in an article written in the 30's of the last century by a prominent representative of Polish traditional (pre-structuralist) linguistics, Andrzej Gawroński: "De Saussure created a genial system. But (...) he sinned in that he wished to impose the principle of precision upon facts whose nature is in general defined as <more or less>. There is no precision here apart from precise realization of the essential lack of precision" (1928: 32). This is an augury of the claim – fundamental for both cognitive linguistics and contemporary TS – that in dealing with linguistic systems (viz. grammars) and texts and/or discourses (viz. originals and translations) in order to be true to facts one can only assume that what is at work in language are principles and probabilities rather than strict rules.

Polish linguists, who always counted literary texts among their favourite material of study, were not happy about the structuralist postulate of the autonomy of language and linguistics. Recognizing the crucial role that the "human factor" plays in the creation and interpretation of metaphor (Rozwadowski), focusing upon culture-specific mechanisms that underlie etymology (Rozwadowski), considering language as a product of a "generalized human being" (Klemensiewicz) striving for effective communication, are all ideas that sound very modern in the context of contemporary TS.

3.2 Literary Studies

Although the founding father of (European) structuralism was a linguist striving to create a theory linguistic *par excellence*, main tenets of classical structuralism were widely applied also to literary studies. The aim was to create a precise scientific method that could be used to research literature and to define its universal features. By analogy with linguistics, the methodology would be thus used to investigate systemic properties of literary language. Main tenets of the literary version of classical structuralism parallel those formulated for linguistics:

- a literary text is a particular linguistic expression, with the aesthetic function at its core;
- a literary text is a realization of a particular system, and its form and meaning are interconnected;
- interpretation of a literary work must make appeal to a general (literary) language and to a (particular and general) literary tradition;
- in their research, literary scholars aim at a description of the structure of a (given) literary work.

3.3 Translation Studies

It is generally assumed that the official introduction of structuralism into TS began in 1972, with James Holmes publishing his *The name and nature of Translation Studies*. The framework was applied chiefly to the literary strand of the discipline. In Eastern Europe it was developed within literature-oriented theories, focusing mainly on poetics and the translation of poetry. Going into details would exceed the scope of this paper; we shall only remind the reader that in 1930's seminal contributions came from representatives of the Prague School: Roman Jakobson analysed the functional role of linguistic elements

in a literary text, and Jan Mukařovský put forward his claim of the smooth transition between descriptive and metaphorical meanings. In the second half of the 20th century the structuralist vein in TS was developed in the Nitra School inspired by Jiří Levý, who – well ahead of his time – pointed out the significance of statistics and language and text corpora in empirical TS.

In other parts of Europe the linguistic strand of TS was more pronounced. The groundbreaking work on contrastive stylistics by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet appeared in 1958 (Vinay & Darbelnet 1958). The next decade brought the componential model of translation proposed by John Catford (1965) and Eugene Nida's (1964) dichotomous distinction between formal and functional equivalence. Developments within the field of contrastive text linguistics gave rise to works in which textual contrasts were applied to translation theory (cf. e.g. Hatim 1990). In Poland, pertinent issues of specialized translation were discussed by many applied linguists – Barbara Kielar, Andrzej Kopczyński, Maria Piotrowska, Alicja Pisarska, Teresa Tomasziewicz or Małgorzata Tryuk.

However, like elsewhere, in the Polish tradition the literary brand of structuralism prevailed. Theoretical works of Edward Balcerzan and Stanisław Barańczak are just as well-known as their original literary output and their literary translations, in Poland and beyond. Landmarks of the “literary bias” abound – from the classical anthology edited by Seweryn Pollak (Pollak 1957), to the recent anthology published by Piotr Bukowski and Magda Heydel (Bukowski & Heydel 2012). If Polish TS scholars of the structuralist persuasion showed their interest in linguistics as an aspect of the methodological framework which they employed, then it was mainly transformational-generative models proposed in the second half of the 20th century. Chomsky's theory of language and grammar – notably the algorithmic model of structural derivation – inspired many renown theorists of translation; Eugene Nida's proposal to look for equivalence (or the notorious *tertium comparationis*) at the level of the deep structure reigned supreme, albeit for a rather short time. While applicable – to some extent – to specialized translation, the generative-transformational approach proved frustrating when scholars were faced with literary texts. On the other hand, if linguists of the structuralist persuasion (notably of the transformational-generative orientation) were at all interested in TS, then it was for the sake of promoting the linguistic theory that they propagated. It is almost trivial to add at this point that in the research on contrastive linguistics all linguists naturally used translation in glosses to their examples, taking the principle of context-free equivalence for granted, and practicing sentence-by-sentence translation, aimed at preserving truth conditions.

4. Reactions against structuralism

4.1 Literary Studies

In literary studies it was soon found that de Saussure's linguistic theory was not a suitable tool to investigate literature, as the assumption of strict precision was not plausible as the guiding principle of research carried out in the humanities. Moreover, little concern for individuality and creativity shown by the advocates of the framework, which

was focused upon systematic and objective characteristics of the objects of investigation, disagreed with literary priorities. Auguries of post-structuralism and postmodernism were quick to arrive: Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism, Roland Barthes' assumption of inherent subjectivism of interpretation and his claim that it is the reader who constructs the narrative using linguistic prompts provided by the text; Julia Kristeva's reflection on intertextuality – these were all signs of the “cultural turn” in literary studies.

4.2 Translation Studies

In TS the original fascination with linguistic structuralism as a possible foundation of “scientific” (or scientist?) translation theory soon gave way to disappointment. Structuralist models and methodologies proved too limited to account for the nuances of translated texts and the intricacies of the translation process. Most significantly, the inadequacy became visible in the field of metaphor. This crucial issue of literary translation was in the late structuralist models – notably the transformational-generative theory – relegated to the periphery as a phenomenon considered as marginal, boarding on linguistic deviation.

Reactions were quick, and sometimes quite radical. In 1999, speaking at a translators' meeting in Bratislava (significantly enough organized in order to celebrate the launching of the UNESCO Chair in TS at the Comenius University), Mary Snell-Hornby, a philologist and one of the most prominent theorists of translation of the decade, demanded that linguists should have nothing to do with TS scholars. In a similar vein, in 2013, one of those scholars referred to “the now exhausted paradigm, based upon contrastive linguistics and comparative procedures, focused on equivalence determined on the level of the linguistic system and poetics” (Heydel 2013: 36).

It seems justified to say that “post-structuralist” trends reached the field of TS earlier than they did the domain of linguistics. With the focus on the process rather than the product of translation, mental processing and understanding were now considered crucial, thus foreboding the fundamental assumption underlying cognitive linguistics. The recognition of the importance of “the human factor” brought into TS the assumption of the translator's subjectivity: translators were given the right to possess their own identity, which resulted in the admission that objectivism is just a myth which makes easier the life of the researcher. More and more often translation was seen as a dynamic activity, with the translator's “decision making process” at the centre of the scholars' interest (cf. e.g. Piotrowska 2007). In 2003 Theo Hermans officially proclaimed the death of the old concept of equivalence – the favourite of all structuralist frameworks – claiming that “for a translation (...) being declared equivalent to its original, whether through divine intervention or legal authentication, marks the end of its status as a translation (...) for as long as translations remain translations, equivalence remains beyond their grasp” (2003: 39–40). The movement known as the “cultural turn” in TS was naturally accompanied by the turn from prescriptivism to descriptivism, launched by Gideon Toury's postulate of searching for descriptive norms, defined as regularities (rather than strict rules) of translator behaviour. With mainstream linguistic theories still navigating their structuralist routes, the relegation of those theories to the background is not astonishing.

When launching their then new journal “Translation Studies” Routledge “invite[d] those as yet unfamiliar with or wary of TS to enter the discussion. Such scholars will include people working in literary theory, sociology, ethnography, philosophy, semiotics, history and historiography, gender studies, post-colonialism, *and related fields*” (www.routledge.com, 2008, emphasis – E. T.). According to this invitation, linguistics could be considered, at best, as “one of the related fields”. And yet, since language is the stuff of which all texts – whether original or translated – are made, it would be unreasonable to deny that theory of translation must be based on a theory of language. The question, then, is: can linguistics claim a less peripheral position? And is there a linguistic framework that could actually be of use to TS? In the remainder of this essay I would like to briefly substantiate the claim that in the last decades of the 20th century one such framework did actually emerge. Known under the umbrella term of Cognitive Linguistics, it marked the advance of post-structuralism in linguistics.

5. Post-structuralism: cognitive linguistics

Since 1987 – the year in which three of the most important manifestos by the founding fathers Cognitive Linguistics appeared in print (Langacker 1987; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff & Johnson 1987) – Cognitive Linguistics has been gaining prominence in contemporary research on language and communication. Under the umbrella term many different strands were launched and developed – from different models of grammar to theories of metaphor and metonymy, to mental spaces and conceptual integration, to discourse. To present even a briefest selection of the vast literature written on these topics would mean going far beyond the limits of this essay. Therefore we shall only summarise those basic tenets that are most significant for the present discussion. They reveal important contrasts with earlier theories and, on the other hand, show their potential as a theoretical linguistic framework for contemporary TS:

- the focus should be on *parole* rather than on *langue*, since usage-based models and bottom-to-top approach guarantee descriptions making direct reference to real linguistic data;
- investigation – and description – of language should be focused on *signifié* rather than *signifiant*, since it is meaning that is the *raison-être* of language as a means of human communication;
- grammar is symbolic: grammatical structures convey meaning just as lexical items do, even though those meanings are schematic in nature; linguistic resources allow speakers of a language to construe their messages in different ways, depending on aspects of imagery, such as the level of specificity, point of view, salience of certain elements of the message, the scope of the scene described, etc. (cf. Langacker 1987, 2008);
- language is to a large extent iconic, i.e. forms mime meanings. Iconicity can be observed on all levels of language – from sound symbolism and onomatopoeia to syntactic structures;
- metaphor (like metonymy) is a mode of thinking rather than a way of replacing names with other names, following the principle of similarity or contingency. And as a mode

- of thinking, it is systematic and constitutes a basic mechanism that underlies the process of human cognition;
- human communication involves dynamic creation and recreation of mental spaces – small packages of elements of meaning, constructed “online” when we think and speak, for the purpose of understanding and communication. In the process of communication these structures are blended and new meanings emerge;
 - differences in conceptual systems that underlie particular languages are culture-specific. Within the cognitive framework, emphasis on this particular aspect of language gave rise to the branch of linguistics known as ethnolinguistics. The interest in relations between language and culture has a strong tradition in Polish reflection on language; Wierzbicka’s theory of semantic primes and natural semantic metalanguage inspired many researchers, beginning with the representatives of the so-called Lublin School of Ethnolinguistics, who develop their pragmatically-based notion of the linguistic worldview (cf. Bartmiński 2009).

6. Cognitive linguistics and translation (studies)

Even though many TS scholars are not (yet?) willing to accept the cognitive theory of language as part of their theoretical framework, the relation is not symmetrical. In the seminal year 1987 George Lakoff, one of the most prominent representatives of cognitive grammar and the founding father of the cognitive theory of metaphor, wrote: “Differences in conceptual systems do create difficulties for translation. (...) It does *not* follow from the impossibility of *translation* that *understanding* is impossible. (...) Translation can occur without understanding, and understanding can occur without the possibility of translation (...). The criterion of getting the truth conditions right in sentence-by-sentence translation ignores what is in the mind. It ignores how sentences are *understood*. And it ignores how concepts are *organized*, both internally and relative to one another” (emphasis in the original). In the same chapter, he pointed to areas of difficulty in translation: culturally defined frames (e.g. baseball), metaphors (e.g. head/belly as the locus of thought/feeling), metonymies (e.g. *I broke down at that junction*), etc. (Lakoff 1987: 311–316).

It is not a mere coincidence that Lakoff admitted being inspired by Roman Jakobson’s research on interrelations between language and literature. Moreover, it is revealing to notice that all the quotations given above could be easily attributed to any scholar working within the field of contemporary TS. It is perhaps even more interesting to notice that they could have well been authored by any of the Polish “pre-structuralists” quoted in section 2 above.

It might be claimed that the linguistic brand in post-structuralist TS implies a more general “turn” towards pre-structuralist or traditional linguistic paradigms, with their emphasis on indeterminateness of non-objectivist meaning and on the role of motivation and the cultural and social context. In reference to the Polish tradition, it becomes apparent that pre-structuralist insights of such linguists as de Courtenay, Rozwadowski, Klemensiewicz, or Wojtasiewicz gain new significance within contemporary “post-structuralist” linguistic frameworks. This, however, must not be taken to mean that linguistic

theories that provide frameworks for TS “run in circles”: the return to classical (pre) structuralism can be metaphorically described as a spiral rather than as a circle. Over the years pre-structuralist insights have gained an overall framework that made it possible to unite them within a single, consistent and comprehensive, linguistic theory. This was made possible because we now know more than they did – about the nature and workings of human body and mind, about the nature of language as a product of human body and mind confronted with the world, about the processes of civilisation and the development of culture. We now know more about particular languages, particular civilizations and particular cultures. But this spiral-like return was doubtlessly enhanced by confrontation with various brands of structuralism.

Consequently, I would like to claim that cognitivist approaches might contribute to present day TS by combining pre-structuralist and structuralist notions with post-structuralist findings. The relevance of cognitive linguistics for TS lies in its recognition of the role of human experience and cognition in language creation, language development and language use. Combined with authentic data analysis (cf. Levý’s postulate of statistical approaches now realized as corpus driven studies), the model that defines meaning as conceptualization of (bodily) experience and describes grammar as an inventory of means that allow for incorporation of the individual “human factor” in linguistic expression, brings together thought, language and culture.

7. Conclusion

It might have seemed more proper to begin – rather than end – this discussion with a definition of translation. Yet it does seem proper to conclude with one of the many: a definition that gives in a nutshell the basic tenet that contemporary TS shares with cognitive linguistics. Formulated fifteen years ago by the Polish literary theorist and TS scholar Anna Legeżyńska, the definition claims that translation is not *a reconstruction*, but *an approximation* of a “model of the world” or “an image” (Legeżyńska 1998: 45, emphasis – E. T.). The approximation can be achieved by trying to reconstruct the type of imagination that led the original author, as reflected in the choices they had made, out of the repertoire that the language puts at their disposal. Legeżyńska limited her definition to translation; the linguist of a cognitivist persuasion would be ready to say that it applies to all acts of linguistic communication. It is at this junction that cognitive linguistics actually meets TS. Ample evidence proving that the meeting can actually be fruitful is given in the first monograph devoted in its entirety to mutual relations between the two neighbouring disciplines and aptly titled *Cognitive Linguistics and Translation. Advances in some theoretical models and applications* (Rojo and Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2013). The name that one of the authors in this volume proposes for the emerging cross-discipline is *cognitive translatology*. It has a long linguistic tradition, and – as we believe – a promising future.

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