Translation: A belaboured term

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Abstract

Interpreting and translation are still positioned by some scholars under the broader discipline of linguistics as aspects of applied linguistics, while others view interpreting as a sub-discipline within the broader and generic discipline of translation studies. However, interpreting studies and translation studies have gradually become fields in their own right, thanks to the prominent individual and collective efforts of scholars to establish the two fields as subjects in academia. In the professionalization of these disciplines, terminologies have been created and attempts to define them made. Some terms have been extended to accommodate new meanings, the result of which has been burdening some of the terms. Within the framework of translation and interpreting studies, this paper analyses how the term translation has been burdened, in view of making some terminological proposals.

Keywords: translation, interpreting, burdening

1.0 Introduction

Translation and interpreting are increasingly becoming important due to globalisation (Hatim & Munday, 2004; Mpemba, 2013; Pöchhacker, 2011;Riccardi, 2002) and have been playing a great role in facilitating interlingual and intercultural communication (Ordudari, 2008). Globalisation has made interaction and communication between people speaking different languages from different cultural backgrounds possible and easy via translators and interpreters (Munday, 2012). Given this increased importance of translation and interpreting, there have been various attempts all over the world to prepare many professionals in the fields to cope with the increase. Following this professionalisation, there have also been various attempts to ensure that adequate terminologies in various languages are prepared. Consequently, thousands of terminologies related to the two fields have been created and

attempts to define them made. In some instances, new terms have been created and in others the meanings of the already existing ones have been extended to accommodate new developments. As a result, some of the terms have been burdened with concepts, while others have been left to enjoy scientific precision, clarity, disambiguity and stability required of terms (Mwansoko, 2003: 267; Mkude, 2008: 157).

One of the terms that have been burdened and of concern to the present paper is translation. It is now not unusual to come across definitions that regard translation as a dual concept referring to oral and written transfers of message. The **research problem** here is, therefore, the **definition of translation**. The present paper examines how best translation and interpreting scholars can capture the relationship between translation and interpreting without resorting to dualising translation as a term. As such, within the framework of translation and interpreting studies, the paper argues that the term translation has been belaboured. It, thus, analyses how the term has been burdened and makes some terminological proposals. The data for the paper were obtained through literature research when the author was doing literature review for his doctoral research.

2.0 Views on Translation

With regard to what translation is, opinion is divided. Views range from laypersons' or general to scholarly or specialised, also known as technical.

2.1 Laypersons' or General Views

As used in this paper, laypersons' or general views on translation are those views that are expressed in relation to translation by laypersons and are meant for general users as opposed to the specialists in the fields of translation and interpreting. These views can usually be found in general publications like general purpose dictionaries. They are normally broad, general and suggestive of two possibilities: translation can either be a process or a product. For instance, *Webster's New World Dictionary*, as cited by Ordudari (2008, p. 2), defines 'to translate' as:

(1)

1. to move from one place or condition to another; transfer; specif. a) Theol. to convey directly to heaven without death, b) Eccles. to transfer (a

bishop) from one see to another; also, to move (a saint's body or remains) from one place of interment to another;

2. to put into the words of a different language;

3. to change into another medium or form, to translate ideas into action;

4. to put into different words; rephrase or paraphrase in explanation;

5. to transmit (a telegraphic message) again by means of an automatic relay.

Again, upon opening of a general purpose dictionary like *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* or *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* in search of the term translation, one is bound to come across a definition like the following:

(2)

translation *n*. **1** the act or an instance of translating. **2** a written or spoken expression of the meaning of a word, speech, book, etc. in another language (*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, quoted in Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 3).

(3)

translation … *noun*. **1** … the process of changing sth that is written or spoken into another language … **2** a text or work that has been changed from one language into another … **3** … the process of changing sth into a different form: *the translation of theory into practice* (Hornby, 2012, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*).

The breadth and the two possibilities highlighted above are crystal clear in the above definitions. For example, with regard to **breadth**, all of the definitions encompass more than one sense, definition (1) leading with more than five. Again, the first senses in definitions (2) and (3), the second, third and fourth senses in definition (1) and the third sense in definition (3) relate to translation as a **process** and focus "on the role of the translator in taking the original or **source text** (ST) and turning it into a text in another language (the **target text**, TT)" (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 3, emphasis in the original). The second senses in both definitions (2) and (3) foreground the **product** produced by the translator as a result of the translation process.

On generality, Schäffner (2004: 1, emphasis added) observes that it is "**laypeople**" that "may come up with the rather **general characterization**" of what translation is. Therefore, based on Schäffner's observation, which is also shared by Hatim and Munday (2004, p. 4) and Mwaituka (2012: 17), definitions (1), (2)

and (3) would qualify to bear the label **general** or **laypersons' definitions**. As one can note, the definitions are intended for general dictionary users. Their generality can be established by looking at their general and imprecise nature.

All of the senses in the definitions (1), (2) and (3) are open to the dictionary user's interpretation. For instance, for the senses in definition (1), one can ask such questions as, "What do we move from one place or condition to another? What do we put into the words of a different language?" Furthermore, the first sense in definition (2) is cyclical. Instead of telling the reader what the term translation is, this sense takes him or her back to the same concept (translating). Again, the second sense in definition (2) and all of the senses in definition (3) use general and vague words like 'something' and seem to put together written and spoken expression in one bag without any sort of demarcation, while sidelining signed and braille (rather than spoken and written) languages (Pöchhacker, 2004a, p. 10 & 11; 2004b, p. 108). In the final analysis, this amounts to generality and imprecision, which are features of laypersons' characterisation (Schäffner, 2004).

However, it should be emphasised here that "laypersons' definitions" does not imply substandard or useless definitions. General definitions are as useful as specialised ones. The only difference is that the general definitions are meant for general users, while the specialised ones are intended for a specific group of few people sharing some common characteristics.

2.2 Specialised Views

Specialised views are those which are expressed by and intended for a specific group of few people who use language which is known and used by only these individuals as they share common characteristics resulting from training and socialisation in a specific domain (Mpemba, 2015). Because the individuals expressing and sharing the views are specialised in their domains, their views are expected to demonstrate precision, clarity and disambiguity.

Specialised views can be easily obtained from specialised publications like field-specific dictionaries, journal articles, textbooks and reports, inter alia. In the fields of translation and interpreting studies, Shuttleworth and Cowie's (1997) *Dictionary of Translation Studies* and Baker and Saldanha's (2009) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* are some of the authoritative publications available. In their dictionary, Shuttleworth and Cowie's (1997, 181) entry on translation reads:

(4)

Translation is an incredibly broad notion which can be understood in many different ways. For example, one may talk of translation as a **process** or a

product, and identify such sub-types as literary translation, technical translation, **subtitling** and **machine translation**; moreover, while more typically it just refers to the transfer of written texts, the term sometimes also includes **interpreting**.

The precision expected of specialised views is compromised in Shuttleworth and Cowie's definition. It just tells us how incredibly broad the notion is and how it can be understood in many different ways without pinpointing the genus and differentia of the notion. Again, in its final line, like the previous definitions of translation, Shuttleworth and Cowie's definition also demonstrates "the potential confusion of translation with **interpreting**" (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 4, emphasis in the original) and the distinction between the process and product is clearly stated. Instead of just demonstrating how incredibly broad the notion is and how it can be understood in many different ways, Shuttleworth and Cowie could have gone a step further and said something like what Mpemba (forthcoming b, *translation mine*) proposes:

(5)

    (1) an **activity** or **process** consisting mainly in

    (2) **cognitive processing** of information in order to

    (3) **produce utterances/signs/texts** which are presumed to

    (4) have **similar** or **equivalent sense** or **meaning** and/or **effect**

    (5) as **previously existing/produced utterances**/signs/texts

    (6) in **another language/mode of communication** and/or **culture** based on

    (7) mainly **permanent presentation/availability** of an utterance/sign/text in a source language and

    (8) **gradual production** of target language utterance/sign/text

    (9) guide by issues of **ethics and morality**

    (10)under **no time pressure**

    (11)with **plenty of chance for correction and revision**

    (12)for the purpose of **enabling** or **facilitating communication**/interaction

    (13)between parties entangled in **communication barrier**

    (14)in a given **setting/situation/context** because of

(15)**language differences**

On the whole, the state of affairs in quotations (1), (2), (3) (4) and (5) points to the fact that "the term *translation* encompasses very distinct perspectives" (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 3, emphasis in the original). As such, views with regard to what translation is are many. Apart from the above views, translation is also regarded technically as *written and oral message transfer* (Munday, 2012, p. 8), *text or discourse production process* (Hale, 2007; Roy, 2000; Wadensjö, 1998;), *cognitive processing activity involving decision making* (Albir & Alves, 2009; Mshindo, 2010; Pöchhacker, 2009), *mediation between languages and cultures* (Katan, 2004) and a *sense-making endeavour* (Lederer, 2010), inter alia, most of which are captured in definition (5). Other terms that are associated with translation include adaptation, localisation (Baker & Saldanha, 2009; Munday, 2012), version, transcreation (Munday, 2012, p. 9), rewording and transmutation (Jakobson, 2004, p. 139). Of particular interest to the present paper is the view that translation is *written and oral message transfer*.

Although technical views on translation are numerous, the most common ones in translation and interpreting studies literature are: (1) translation as written transfer of written messages, (2) translation as a prototypical or an umbrella term for written and oral transfer.

2.2.1   Translation as Written Transfer

This view holds that translation deals with transfer of written messages from one language into written messages in another language. It is a very common view in translation studies and is supported by many scholars from various nationalities and language backgrounds. For instance, Mwansoko[1] (2013: 1, *translation mine, emphasis added*) defines *tafsiri* (translation) as:

> *... zoezi la uhawilishaji wa* **mawazo katika maandishi** *kutoka lugha moja hadi nyingine. Kwa maelezo ya Catford (1965, p. 20) kufasiri ni "kuchukua mawazo yaliyo katika maandishi kutoka lugha moja (lugha chanzi) na kuyaweka badala yake mawazo yanayolingana kutoka lugha nyingine (lugha lengwa)"*

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[1] Professor of translation and terminology, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; writes in Kiswahili and English.

> ... an exercise involving **transference of written ideas** from one language into another. In Catford's (1965, p. 20) words, to translate is "to replace textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language)".

Mwansoko insists, "*ili kufanikisha shughuli ya tafsiri, … mawazo yanayoshughulikiwa **sharti yawe katika maandishi, na si vinginevyo**"* (in order to accomplish a translation activity, the ideas dealt with **must be written and not otherwise**) (ibid: 1, emphasis added). Sharing similar sentiments with Mwansoko, Munday[2] (2012, p. 8, emphasis in boldface in the original, italics added) opines that "the process of translation between two *written languages* involves the changing of an original *written text* (the **source text** or **ST**) in the original verbal language (the **source language** or **SL**) into a *written text* (the **target text** or **TT**) in a different verbal language (the **target language** or **TL**)". Shuttleworth and Cowie's (1997, p. 181) contention that while more typically translation "just refers to the transfer of written texts, the term sometimes also includes interpreting" also supports the writtenness criterion as a central cog for translation to take place and suggests that the difference between translation and interpreting.

It should be noted here that writtenness is not the condition for translation to be accomplished. Neither is it a factor for distinguishing between interpreting and translation since more specific criteria for defining translation and interpreting have been proffered in the academic field of Translation Studies and in translator/interpreter training (Schäffner, 2004, p. 1). In her own words, Schäffner puts it correctly:

If asked what the difference is between translation and interpreting, laypeople may come up with the rather general characterisation that translation is concerned with written texts and interpreting with oral speech. In the academic field of Translation Studies and in translator/interpreter training, attempts have been made to provide more specific criteria for defining the two activities. For example, Kade (1968) introduced a time factor as the basic differentiating criterion: the availability of the source text. For a translator, the source text is available in some fixed form (for example, printed on paper or recorded on a tape) until the target text has been produced. This allows the translator to refer back to the source text as often as necessary and to correct and revise the target text, using a variety of tools. Therefore, the final target text may be the result of several 'attempts', having been produced in several stages from a first draft to

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[2] Professor of Translation Studies, University of Leeds, United Kingdom; writes in English.

the final product. An interpreter, in contrast, gets only one attempt at producing the target text as output as the source text is presented to the interpreter orally and only once and the target text has to be produced immediately (Kade (1968, p. 1).

The concerns expressed by Schäffner are not very new. Riccardi (2002), for example, observes that German scholars noted the problems associated with orality-writtennes dichotomy (*Übersetzen* and *Dolmetschen*) and abandoned it as early as the 1800s and proposed another dichotomy in its stead. This happened after publication of a treatise *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* by Schleiermacher in 1813 who proposed a division of translation "into **pragmatic** and **literary/philosophic** translation, the former also including interpreting" (Riccardi, 2002, p. 21, emphases added). Although Schleiermacher's contribution is very much welcome, its inclusion of interpreting under literary/philosophic translation was not very right as explained under the subsequent subsection.

2.2.2 Translation as a Prototypical or Umbrella or Hyperonymic or Superordinate Term

This view is largely supported by, among others, Pöchhacker (2004a; 2009; 2010a & b) and Munday (2012) who argue that Interpreting Studies can be viewed as a subdiscipline of the wider field of Translation Studies. To them and other protagonists of this view, Translation Studies is the broader discipline which subsumes translation and interpreting. To differentiate the umbrella term **translation** from the subdiscipline of translation, Pöchhacker uses Translation with a capital initial in a hyperonymic sense and small-letter initial in a subdisciplinary sense.

The subsuming nature of the term translation (that it subsumes oral and written phenomena) was noted as early as the 1990s. Shuttleworth and Cowie, (1997, p. 83), for example, defined interpreting as "oral translation of a spoken message or text". Much ground on this aspect is covered by Mead (1999) who conducted a lexicographical study on the definitions of the words 'interpret' and 'interpreter' in English language and their equivalents "*interpréter*" and "*interprète*" in French, "*interpretieren*" and "*Interpret(in)*" (restricted to the fields of interpretation of art or literature) and "*dolmetschen*" and "*Dolmetscher(in)*" (confined to oral translation and to those who provide it) in German and "*interpretare*" (the verb which does not actually make any reference to oral translation) and "*interprete*" in Italian languages (Mead, 1999, p. 199 & 204-206). His objective was to reflect on definitions of these words from five authoritative English reference books – (1) *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* by Crystal (1987), (2) *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* by Sinclair (1987), (3) *Chambers English Dictionary*

by Schwarz *et al.* (1988), (4) *Webster's New World Dictionary* by Neufeldt (1988), and (5) *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* by Brown (1993) – and make "an examination of how the equivalent terms are defined in one French, one German and one Italian dictionary" (Mead, 1999:, p. 200).

Mead discovered that the highest common factor of the definitions surveyed is their dependence on the concept of *translating*, stated by all of them to be specifically *oral* in nature. All of the five authoritative English reference books consulted hinged their definitions on the *oral translation* criterion as they regarded interpreting to be an activity in which the interpreter:

- "Make[s] an *oral translation*" (Crystal, 1987, p. 423, emphasis added).

- "Repeats what someone else is *saying* by *translating* immediately into another language so that other people can understand it" (Sinclair, 1987, p. 764, emphasis added).

- "*Translates orally* for the benefit of two or more parties speaking different languages" (Schwars, *et al*, 1988, p. 746, emphasis added).

- *Translates* "a foreign language *orally*, as in conversation between people speaking different languages" (Neufeldt, 1998, p. 706, emphasis added).

- "*Translates orally* the words of people speaking different languages" (Brown, 1993;, 1399, emphasis added).

Adapted from Mead (1999, p. 200)

3.0 Burdening Views on Translation: Discussion and Alternative Proposals

From the above discussion, it is clear that, as noted by Grutman (2009, p. 262), "The scope of the term 'translation' has arguably become too wide … with 'translation' being used as a synecdoche for most types of ordinary communication, such as writing, reading and conversing."

Grutman's observation suggests that the term translation has been burdened and is, therefore, belaboured. Of all the specialised views discussed above, the view that translation is a superordinate term for translation and interpreting subdisciplines is unnecessarily burdening for two reasons. First, the areas covered by translation are already too vast and complex to allow extension to include interpreting, which has always been the case as Hatim and Munday (2004, p. 3, emphasis in the original) note:

Even if **interpreting** is excluded, the potential field and issues covered by translation are vast and complex. *Benvenuti!* may be what many people expect

as a translation of *Welcome!*, but how do we explain *Hi!* ? Translation also exists between different varieties of the same language and into what might be considered less conventional languages, such as braille, sign language and morse code. What about the flag symbol being understood as a country, nationality or language – is that 'translation' too? Such visual phenomena are seen on a daily basis: no-smoking or exit signs in public places or icons and symbols on the computer screen, such as the hour-glass signifying 'task is under way, please wait' or, as it sometimes seems, 'be patient and don't touch another key!'

Secondly, extension of an already existing term to include another concept would blur its precision as a technical term. It is generally agreed that the main concern of any specialist "is to define his subject matter precisely and to establish a clear and logical progression of ideas" (Crystal & Davy 1969, p. 251). In order to reflect these goals, the language used has to be specialised, with a number of such distinguishing features as precision of concepts (Mwansoko, 2003: 267) and arguments (Munday, 2012 , p. 305); "objectivity of intercourse; multiplicity of impersonal expressions; and rare use of figures of speech and imagery" (Mwansoko, 2003, p. 267). Of much relevance to the present study is the feature of precision of concepts.

Precision of concepts is usually achieved through the use of terminological vocabulary, which renders any academic text precise and highly objective. As Mwansoko (2003, pp. 268-269) rightly adduces, "Technical terminologies, by their nature, do not have (unnecessarily many) synonyms or homonyms. They are also essentially non-polysemous, non-emotional and normally reflect the concepts they represent very accurately (i.e. unambiguously)." Thus, conceptualising capital initial Translation as a hyperonymic term encompassing translation and interpreting, according to the position adopted by the present study, is to unnecessarily infringe precision and burden the concept. Translation and interpreting are considered to be different, but closely related fields (Nolan, 2005; Gile, 2009; Schäfner, 2004); Considering one of them to be a subdiscipline of the other creates definitional problems with regard to the umbrella term. Pöchhacker (2004a, p. 11), one of the proponents of the view that capital initial Translation is an umbrella term, reckons the problem of regarding interpreting as form of translation as he notes, "Making our concept of interpreting hinge on the generic notion of Translation, however, leaves us exposed to the more general uncertainty of how to define that term" (see also Pöchhacker, 2004b, p. 108).

3.1 In Other Languages

The dual conceptual status of interpreting is also reflected in its linguistic designation in various languages. In Russian and other Slavic languages, a

separate term for interpreting does not exist, and interpreting is denoted by qualifying the generic term for translation with an oral qualification. For example, the item *chik* (oral) in Russian is added to *perevod* (translation) to make переводчик (*perevodchik*, meaning oral translation) (Pöchhacker, 2010a, p. 153). Similarly, classical Chinese had only one expression, *yi* (譯), to refer to translation and interpreting as well as translators and interpreters. In the twentieth-century, Modern Standard Chinese that the term *kouyi* (口譯) was coined to refer to interpreting (Lung 2009, p. 119). However, it is not different from the Russian formation because the coinage is just an addition of 口 (*kou*, meaning oral) to 譯 (*yi*, meaning translation) to make口譯 (*kouyi*, meaning oral translation).

The Chinese and Russian move from using one term to refer to two separate disciplines with the same one and coining different terms for the other field is commendable. However, by regarding interpreting as *kouyi* and *perevodchik* (oral translation), their coinage still burdens the term translation, just like what the capital initial Translation does. It is in view of this burdening perspective that the present paper seeks to make some alternative proposals.

3.2 Alternative Proposals

Given the ambiguity and other constraints surrounding the term translation, one can be pardoned to argue that it does not qualify as a terminological vocabulary representing a hyperonym for translation and interpreting disciplines. It, thus, needs to be freed from its dual conceptual status and accorded the conceptual precision required of terminological vocabularies. In its place, a term that can clasp both translation and interpreting without ambiguity has to be coined.

Proposals to coin new umbrella terms are not new, but have probably been absent in English language. For instance, in 1968, Kade "established the conceptual and theoretical groundwork for the systematic study of translation and interpreting" (Pöchhacker, 2004a, p. 30) by coining the German hyperonym…***Übersetzung*** to include *Übersetzen* (translation) and *Dolmetschen* (interpreting) (Pöchhacker, 2004a; 2009; Munday, 2012).

In the same token, in 2011, Wanjala proposed a Kiswahili term *ukafsiri* to denote a combination of *ukalimani* (interpreting) and *tafsiri* (translation). Wanjala (2011), however, was not thinking of *ukafsiri* as an umbrella term for both *ukalimani* and *tafsiri*, but rather, he was thinking of a simultaneous endeavour of listening to an oral message from one language, translating it instantaneously and writing it in another language as it is done by district and resident magistrates and High Court judges in Tanzania when they listen in courts of law to oral messages in Kiswahili and put them on records in English language. Wanjala was thinking of the two

activities in terms of an oral-written dichotomy. That is, interpreting involves oral transference, while translation involves written transference. He actually defines *ukalimani* as "*Kuhawilisha ujumbe ulioko katika mazungumzo, pamoja na uamilifu wake, kutoka lugha chasili hadi lugha lengwa kwa kuzingatia isimu, utamaduni na muktadha wa jamii husika.*" (Transference of oral messages, with their functions thereof, from a source to a target language in accordance with the linguistic and cultural norms, and the context of both languages) and he defines *tafsiri* as:

> *...mchakato wa **uhawilishaji wa ujumbe katika maandishi**, pamoja na uamilifu wake, kutoka lugha chasili kenda lugha lengwa kwa mujibu wa isimu, muktadha na utamaduni wa lugha zote mbili. Uhawilishaji huu wa ujumbe hulenga mawasiliano kati ya jamii mbili zinazotumia lugha tofauti* (p. 39).

> ...a process of **transferring written messages**, including their functions thereof, from a source language to a target language in accordance with the linguistic and cultural norms, and the context of both languages. This transfer of messages targets communication between two communities using different languages.

> (Wanjala, 2011, p. 32, *translation and emphasis mine*)

Regardless of his thinking orientations, Wanjala's proposal is groundbreaking and holds much water warranting its adoption in Kiswahili interpreting and translation scholarship to cater as an umbrella term for interpreting and translation. More importantly, it takes cognisance of the antiquitarian practice of interpreting and places it in the initial position followed by translation which came later on the scene as a result of the technologisation of the word. We can, thus, have *Taaluma za Ukafsiri* (Interpreting-Translation Studies).

In English, four proposals can be made depending on what – between interpreting and translation – we think should come first. If we think translation came earlier on the scene and therefore would deserve precedence, two candidates are proposed:

(1) Transinterpreting

(2) Transpreting

But if we think that, given its antiquitarian nature, it is interpreting that deserves the precedence, also two candidates are proposed:

(1) Interpranslation

(2) Interprenslation

As far as the view adopted by this paper is concerned, interpreting is the oldest tradition. Thus, the suitable candidates to serve as umbrella term for interpreting and translation are *interpranslation* and *interprenslation*. The two proposals would save interpreting and translation scholars from burdening one of the existing terms and ending up with ambiguity. For instance, since the indicator of hyperonimity of the term translation is the initial capital T, how can one tell whether or not it is hyperonimic when it appears at the beginning of a sentence? To the contrary, the two proposed concepts are tailored with the features of precision, objectivity and impersonality in mind. Which one can be the best is left for the scholars to decide.

4.0 Conclusion

The present paper set out to examine how best translation and interpreting scholars can capture the relationship between translation and interpreting without resorting to dualising the term translation. Within the framework of translation and interpreting studies, the paper has shown that the term translation is belaboured and, thus, deserves to be freed. To accord the term such freedom, the paper has made some terminological proposals.

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