Study in Definition of "Translation"

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Translation, as a polysemous word, basically contains 3 meanings in the field of languages. Jeremy Munday, a famous British translation theorist, described the 3 meanings in *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (Munday 2012):

"1. the general subject field or phenomenon ('I studied translation at university')

2. *the product – that is, the text that has been translated ('they published the Arabic translation of the report')*

3. *the process of producing the translation, otherwise known as translating ('translation service')."*

(p. 8)

What I try to define in this paper is its third meaning as a translating process.

In order to give a formal definition of translation, I'll follow the formal structure of definition that I learnt previously in Terminology class. In the PPT slides Dr. KIT showed us in Lecture 7, there is an intuitional equation, as follows.
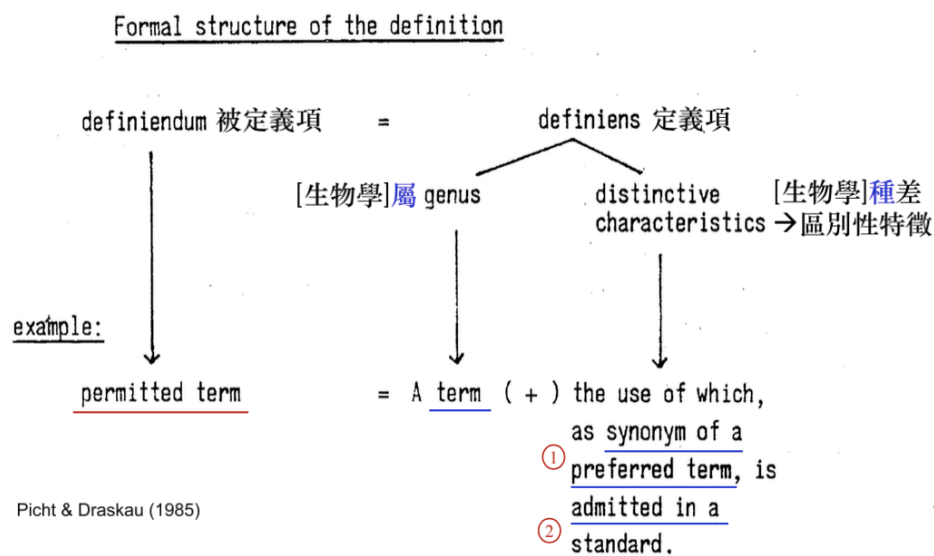
(p. 10)

Simplifying the above equation, I regard the following one as the basic structure of my definition and use it to analyze the existed definitions of translation.

$$definiens = genus + distinctive\ characteristics$$

Firstly, defining which genus translation belongs to is complicated. In other words, it's vital to decide translation's hypernym. Secondly, attention is needed to pay to precise expression of translation's distinctive characteristics. From these prospective, I looked up the existed definitions and chose six representative ones to analyze.

A. *"Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style."* (Eugene A. Nida and Taber, 1969)
B. *Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language."* (Peter Newmark, 1988)
C. *"Translation is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text."*
(The Oxford Companion to the English Language, 1992)
D. *"Translation is a rendering of something into another language or into one's own language from another."* (Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary)
E. *"The act or process of translating something into a different language."* (Merriam Webster)
F. "*Translation is the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in anther (source language), preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences.*" (Dubois et al. 1973)

In Nida's definition, translation is to "reproduce" the closest natural corresponding meaning and information, thus the hypernym he chose for translation was reproduction. Reproduction means "the action or process of copying something" (Oxford online dictionary). If consisting in the reproduction, translation seems equivalent to finding a presupposed expression in the target language. However, there are many items that are new to the target language due to the distinction between the source language background and target one, and thus cannot be directly reproduced. Nida also mentioned the "natural equivalent" in his definition, but equivalent is another term needed to be defined. Is there any difference allowed? If so, to what extent it can bear? With these questions, people cannot judge whether a process is a translation or not with this definition.

The hypernym Peter Newmark chose was craft. Craft means "any occupation or avocation requiring special skills, especially manual ones, including carpentry, sewing, pottery, etc." (Webster's New World College Dictionary) However, nowadays, translation isn't limited to the manual work. We utilize technology in translating, for example, CAT (Computer Aided Translation) tool are designed to help translators translating texts. From the above prospective, this is an **excessively restrictive definition**. On the other hand, Newmark pointed out using the same message in target language to replace that of source language. But there is not always same message in two languages. Semantic meanings hide in the source text, and the meaning people want to make may be different from what the literal meaning. However, such semantic meaning may not exist in the target language, thus leads to no same or even coordinating message. Translators play a much more important role than just seeking same expression.

In the third definition, communication serves as the hypernym of translation. I admit translation belongs to the whole communication system, but it's inappropriate to regard them as direct hypernym and hyponym. Communication contains exchanging in its meaning. It's acceptable to illustrate as translation contributes to communication, but in the translating process, exchanging seldom happens. In other words, this

definition also fit to exchange. Therefore, it's an **excessively broad definition**. The rest part shares the same problem with Nida's opinion. It's hard to define the word "equivalent".

The fourth definition only shows translation works between two languages, but ignore other distinctive characteristics. What's more, rendering is a synonym for translation, cannot serve as hypernym. The word "translation" is much simpler than "rendering", so it's inappropriate to use rendering in translation's definition.

The fifth one, as far as I am concerned, is a circular definition. We cannot use "translating" to define "translation", because the two words are paronyms, and "translating" doesn't present the concept of "translation".

The definition given by Dubois is a rather acceptable one. Expression means "the action of making known one's thoughts or feelings" (Oxford Living Dictionaries). What translators translate is the expression of author who creates the source text, and they integrate it with their own expression that is comprehensible in the target language background. Therefore, it's fair to say "expression" is the hypernym of "translation". This definition values the target language much more and implies translator's dynamic role in translation. However, shortcoming in this definition lies in the word "semantic". Munday illustrated the relationship between speaker's meaning and semantic meaning with the following diagram.
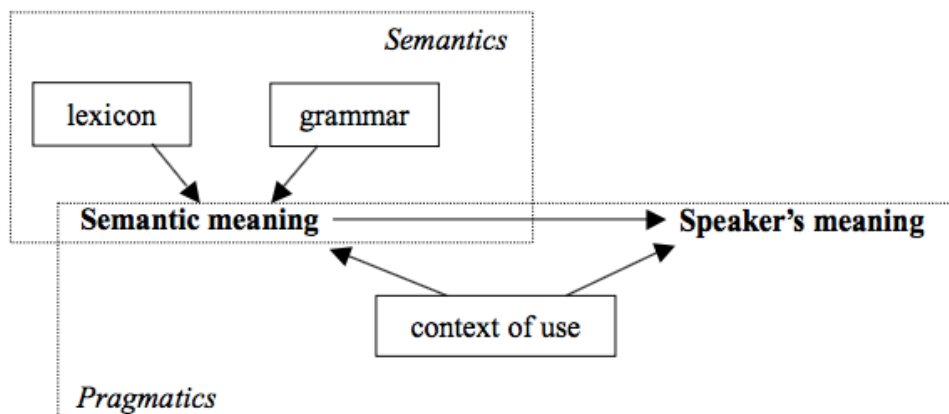
（p. 156）

It's clear to see that semantic meaning cannot represent the whole meaning of the text. The equivalence of speaker's meaning is also what translators need to preserve, especially when it comes to the distinction between two languages.

From the analysis above, I choose "expression" as hypernym. As for the distinct characteristics of translation, firstly, it must deal with two languages, to be specific, the source language and the target language. Secondly, the meaning or message translation focuses on is not only the semantic one but also the connotative one lying in the culture that the language belongs to. Thirdly, there is a great deal of message doesn't have the corresponding expression in the target language, thus some word like "same" "corresponding" should be avoided in the definition. Fourth, due to the reason mentioned before, translator's dynamic role in the process cannot be ignored, thus words like "find" "replace" should not appear. Taking all of these into consideration, I

give my own definition of translation.

Translation is the natural expression in the target language of the meaning of the original message in source language.

1. I emphasis "the natural expression in the target language", which allows translators to do reasonable adjustment, though the adjustment should base on the target language background.
2. Rather than finding the equivalence of original message, expressing the meaning of original message is the mission of translators in my view. What translators deal with is not only the semantic meaning, but also speaker's meaning, as well as the style, and all can be contained in the "meaning of the original message in source language".
3. Aiming at giving a comprehensible definition, all the words I chose are plain and ambiguity-free.

Consequently, I regard such definition as an appropriate one.

My shallow opinion is definitely far from perfect, but with further study, my understanding of the defining system and process will be gradually deepened. But I really treasure this opportunity to define a word. Data-collecting was the most suffering but meaningful step, which gave solid support for my further analysis. Critical thinking is needed in reading every definition and analyzing. And I believe with the constant study of translation and language, translation's definition will be improved correspondingly.

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