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**THE LANGUAGE OF TRANSLATION  
(ANALYSIS ON LANGUAGE-DISOURSE RELATIONS AND  
TRANSLATORIAL ATTITUDES)**

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses the translatorial attitudes to language applied by the translator during the process of translation. It views two types of ‘language’- ‘language and its discourses’ (language proper) and ‘discourses and their language’ (langue), respectively ascribing them as prescriptivist and descriptivist approaches to interlingual transfer. It further argues that a solely prescriptivist approach to any text based on the linguistic material of the language without considering the larger discourse wherein the text is portrayed delimits or alters the original content and leads to aberrations from the source context and discourse. The paper posits that much higher levels of inter-lingual and inter-discursive equivalence can be accomplished by the translators when descriptivism and prescriptivism as translation approaches are applied in a combined (successive, not amalgamated) form. The paper substantiates the complementarity of these two by using the indivisibility and unexclusiveness of the planes of content and expression further elaborated in the stranding of ‘language’ and ‘discourse’ as a single genetic ladder allowing endless transfer and interaction between the two. The paper then goes on to discuss the relationship between ‘language’ and ‘langue’ (discourse) by offering a combined, complex approach to translation.

**Key words:** language, discourse, prescriptivism, langue, translation approach, translatorial attitude

## 1. Introduction

If we regard language as the sum of all possible variations of discourses ever created and used by a particular group of people, it stops being a separate phenomenon in the chain of the mental processes of humans. Hence, language stops being (and never has been) an independent ‘something’ created for communicative purposes. Thus, language

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is perhaps a consequence, rather than an aim. Whenever language is regarded as such, the problem in the selection of a particular language for translation automatically takes the ‘road to solution.’

It appears to be easier to implement any inter-lingual activity by approaching the constituents of two (or more) languages as ones belonging to discourses rather than to ‘something fixed and firm’ such as elements dominated by rules. In other words, while transferring the message from one language to another, it is easier to select elements not subject to formal, inspection-based, or doctrine-based observations (or to a fixed semiotic system for that matter), but rather to multi-layer, particle-based ones.

## **2. Prescriptivism in Translation and Its Problems**

The different approaches to translation originate from both basic and academic approaches to language use, and from the various tendencies in linguistics and social sciences. A carrier of a language, when approaching a language or even two or more languages, does follow certain rules: sometimes the rules are predefined, and sometimes they are a case-based set. The prescriptivist approach suggests that there are correct and wrong ways to use language based on a certain state of a given language and its rules. In other words, prescriptivism is an attempt at setting forth rules that define the correct usage of language by preserving certain boundaries for the language.

The same is true for translation. A closer look at existing translation theories shows that as segmentary as they are (even the descriptivist-discursive ones that emerged during the cultural turn that appear to scold the prescriptivist ones such as Dolet’s and Dryden’s elucidations) are unable to avoid suggesting prescriptivist tips on how translation should be done. The reason for this is the linguistic nature of translation itself. It is the application of language in the process of translation and the inevitability of the form-and-content dichotomy that ultimately compels descriptive translation theorists to resort to prescriptivism. The indivisibility and the non-exclusiveness of the planes of form and content are the core of the very nature of language and will be further elaborated on in this paper. But as far as prescriptivism and descriptivism in translation are concerned, just as all translation theories are complementary and together form a unified understanding of the multifarious nature of translation, these two approaches continually feed each other, making the overall translation (as a lingual activity) more efficient and “adequate.”

For this reason, giving precedence to either one of these approaches while denying the other limits the mental processes involved in translation. No matter how vital prescriptivism may be in the systemization and the definition of the boundaries that make a language a functional tool of message transfer, knowledge registration and overall communication, absolute prescriptivism in translation can and does lead to harmful consequences in the evolution of translation practices and development of translation schools both in short and long terms.

At first glance, the translation process might seem to be the mere selection of linguistic units from a synonymic set in the target language. However, as Nida and Taber demonstrated, the translator performs the translator performs a vast number of

different mental processes at the ‘speed of light.’ Some of these processes include comprehending the meaning of the source utterance, scaffolding the context behind it, visualizing the content in the source time-space (or discourse), thinking about the approaching deadline (as well as how tired and in need of rest they might be), visualizing the same situation in the target linguo-culture, pondering the possible untranslatability of certain concepts or elements, lingualizing the content, choosing words, thinking of better options by forming a synonymic set, etc. This shows that the semiotic body of the target language is not the first place a translator runs to for performing their task. We come to see it is the reconstructed, revisualized content that induces the appropriate selection of linguistic means to give it the flesh and bones it needs to be able to be inter-lingually communicable.

So, in the process of translation, digging deeper and finding better linguistic solutions for element-selection and style-transfer may be up to the changes in attitudes of the professionals towards the commonly considered hierarchical position of ‘language’ and how well the translator is able to work with these two planes without untangling the “DNA strain.” Thus, the results of element-selection and style-transfer may be better quality if in both their lower and higher levels, the widely known concept ‘language-and-its-discourses’ is challenged with the alternatively sounding ‘discourses-and-their-language.’

For this very reason, the equivalents of the elements chosen during translation must not be selected via analyses limited by the ‘normalizations’ of doctrines or governmental ‘inspections’ which can be regarded as the most institutionalized forms of descriptivism. Well known ‘inspections’ responsible for the censorship and the ‘normalization’ of language use pretend to be ones dealing with ‘discourses’ (answering the question ‘How to use discourse?’), while instead they treat the lingual reality of a given culture/nation (in our case – the Armenian lingual reality) as the subordinate of the above-mentioned ‘something fixed and firm’ – the *language*. In other words, scholars and other people dictating discourse-norms regard the linguistic reality – the sum of discourses ever created and used – as the “fetus” of the dominant “language” in the hierarchy.

### **3. Descriptivism in Translation**

#### **3.1. Language: Common Styles and Tendencies**

Below, we will try to explain some specific denotations and terms used in this paper, so that the overall “language” of this paper is easier to grasp and analyze by the reader within the specially designed “world” (domain) of this work.

In this paper, any commonly used or newly created lingual manifestation is denoted by the name ‘discourse’ if it accomplishes common usage within a socio-cultural environment and domain. In other words, any predictable or random case of element creation that survives the “harsh” conditions imposed by time and the requirements of cultural establishment becomes a *discourse*, thus a communicative variable in a lingual reality.

Any discourse is a variable, however ‘language’ is not the set of all possible variables, as it should include a finite number of variables to be considered somewhat final or at least functional, definable for a certain period, and most importantly - dominant enough to rule over separate cases in lingual reality and filter what is “right” and what is “wrong.”

In this regard, *language* is a means of function creation in communication and stands for the set of commonly known elements, styles, patterns, sounds and socio-cultural tendencies. More succinctly, *language* is the common styles and tendencies, while *discourse* is the communicative variable that is made of elements of the language.

This is quite similar to the concept of the Universe that infinitely expands in itself, namely in mass; and here *language* is the ‘matter’ with all of its basic elements, while *discourses* are all the possible combinations of the elements that generate matter, e.g. life, which is always in a continuous process of transformation and operates functionally. It is common knowledge that the existence, interaction, and evolution of matter within this space-time is entirely dependent on various forces such as gravity (although starting from Einstein, gravity is regarded as an inherent quality and a state of an object rather than a force applied by it). In a similar analogy, language is not an exception, but its usage and the subsequent formation of discourses are entirely dependent on such forces as ‘culture’ (which is the gravity of any society that holds it together) along with its constituent norms, beliefs, and values. Simply put, the language (‘matter’) is utilized in specific (cultural) environments (infinitely expanding universe) while *discourses* are the actors or the outcome of its application, that, in passing from one form to another, alter the reality, transform it, create new concepts and phenomena, thus reciprocally feeding the ‘matter’ which was language. For a scientist (here, the translator) it should be ‘life’ that matters more, and not the despairing goal of limitation and delimitation of space.

The *language* expands due to the infinite number of possible *discourses* that are being born within the ‘language space.’ In other words, Discourse are the domains of certain thoughts, expressed in a style called language, surviving in a socio-cultural environment,

We will attempt to use a simple example to help clarify this statement. A scholar of linguistics, language anthropology, or ethnolinguistics, when trying to come up with an analysis on the origin of a particular language – in this case, the Armenian language - cannot point to a single historical segment in the earliest periods of its (the language’s) development or to a single state of a pre-language<sup>4</sup>, and say “This is the Armenian language!” or “The Armenian language starts from here!” Even today, a scholar cannot point to any discourse or any socio-lingual or doctrinal layer and say: ‘This is the Armenian language!’ or ‘This is the purest and truest form of the Armenian language!’ Such statements would have been and are (if uttered today) absolutistic and

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<sup>4</sup> Here the word ‘pre-language’ is used as a term of ethnography (as *any* pre-state of a language: pre-Armenian, pre-Russian, pre-English, etc.), not of anthropology (as a pre-tool of communication with no high-level constituents: syntax, vocabulary, complex logic, etc.).

incomplete<sup>5</sup>, as they would imply the elimination or non-consideration of certain discourses being created by the language carriers at the moment of the mentioned *statement*. This is how translation works as well because any given target text is never fully equivalent or even absolute and is only relevant to a specific period of time in a specific space (a specific strip in space-time) - thus, *discourse-dependent*. The vast number of Bible translations prove this. As Jakobson shows in his paper (Jakobson 2000), absolute equivalence is impossible within the same linguistic code and reality, let alone in a different one. Hence, we should not disregard the fact that any scientific manifestation and its following theories are not fond of absolutisms and theoretical incompleteness.

Whenever the translator consciously begins to approach texts as discourses rather than ‘language-proper’ and bases the analysis on socio-lingual belonging and the contextual features of the given elements, the appearing results become more effective in terms of semantic efficiency, scientific objectivity, and cultural value. And here, it would be most pertinent to question the expression ‘approaching discourses’ and come up with a definition or at least a proper, logically valid, and inclusive description.

This kind of approach to the lingual reality of any intellectual group of people gives precedence to ‘discourses-and-their-language’ rather than ‘language-and-its-discourses.’ Of course, to start writing an etymological history of *language* and *discourse* and an inclusive, scientific *tractatus* on the semantics of the latter, as well as trying to answer the ‘chicken-egg’ question of this very issue will give birth to hundreds of pages of logical propositions, simple and complex syllogisms and tautologies. For this very reason, we will try to come up with just a simple postulation that goes:

*In any lingual reality, carriers create, mutate, and deal with discourses that have their language.*

Here, the word ‘*discourses*’, as mentioned before, refers to the all possible variables in human communication, while the word ‘*language*’ (the common tendencies and styles) means a systemized, constant, fixed-in-a-given-moment and well-established means of element creation in communication. Even one of the most disputed theories for the origins of language - the Biblical account where we see language in use in its most basic, nominative-referential function (nomenclature- when Adam was giving names to the creation) - shows that language was needed as a semiotic form BECAUSE these things already existed and not vice versa. If we subscribe to this theory, it was the content that necessitated the creation of a certain form. But neither “the egg”, nor “the chicken” are mutually exclusive and feed each other. And regardless of which one came first (even if the semiotic system of language had been artificially created first (which is not a plausible scenario)), these two complement and reinforce each other and cannot exist independently.

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<sup>5</sup> Here we use the word ‘incomplete’ with the semantics suggested by Kurt Gödel – an Austrian, and later American, logician, mathematician, and philosopher known for his “incompleteness theorems.”

**In a non-limited set of units (such as any language), the sum of all units is the whole, and the whole is not the whole if one of the units is eliminated and/or disregarded.**

If ‘the whole’ fails to be ‘whole’ due to the elimination of one or  $n$  number of its constituents, then we may call that failed ‘whole’ a **pseudo-whole**; in our case, this denotation implies the term **pseudo-language** ( $L_{ps}$ ).

Below we illustrate the above-mentioned statement in a simple mathematical form for the sake of formulation.

$D_{sum} = L$	• L stands for ‘language’
$D_{sum} = \{d_1 + d_2 + d_3 + d_n\}$	• $d/d_n$ stands for ‘any discourse ever created and used’
$\{d_1 + d_2 + d_3 + d_n\} = L$	• $D_{sum}$ stands for the $d_n$ .
$L_{ps} = L - d_n$	
$L \neq L_{ps}$	• $L_{ps}$ stands for ‘pseudo-language’

**IMPORTANT NOTE FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF LOGICAL INCONSISTENCIES:** in the last statement ‘ $L - d_n$ ’ the ‘-’ (minus) does not mean that the discourse does not exist, for it would mean that any Language ( $L$ ) that misses any discourse ( $d_n$ ) is Pseudo-Language ( $L_{ps}$ ). The ‘minus’ here means that the ‘ $d_n$ ’ was left unconsidered as part of the socio-lingual reality by the carrier – in our case, by the translator or the theorist in the course of an interlingual and intercultural activity.

The ‘ $L - d_n$ ’ part in practice is of a doctrinal – ideological, ethical, and aesthetic – nature, and belongs to certain prescriptivist ‘authorities.’ Almost in all cases, those ‘authorities’ are the representatives of governmental inspections called ‘language inspection.’ Of course, in this “battlefield” the least “intact” actor is the one that is of the most organic nature. It is the human being - the carrier of the sum of all possible discourses, people walking around and creating new elements, representatives of different layers of the society and of various areas of life; in one word – the nation, the communicating mass. This is the only “natural authority” to decide the present and the future of the linguistic reality of a particular ethno- or culture-mass.

If in ‘ $d_n$ ’ there are elements  $A, B, C$  and  $A_1, B_1, C_1$  and if commonly known, well-established combinations exist, for example, ‘ $A \wedge B$ ’, ‘ $A \wedge C$ ’, ‘ $B \wedge C_1$ ’ and ‘ $A \wedge C \wedge B_1 \wedge C_1$ ’ (here we have used the symbol  $\wedge$  to denote the concept of ‘and’ / ‘combined with’), then with a set of  $\{A, B, C, A_1, B_1, C_1\}$  one can carry out any variant of combinations.

Even if this kind of a methodological attitude may seem as one contradicting “formality”, for it suggests complete freedom in word-creation and phrase-creation, it is fair to come up with such an attitude as the practical lingual reality often gives birth to very odd, never-heard-of and never-expected, contradicting-to-the-rules-of-a-particular-language elements, for instance, odd neologisms and ‘embryo’ words and phrases. So here, if we let simple logic enter the domain of our observation, then we can conclude that either the “rules” are relative, or the “odd neologisms and embryo words and phrases” should not have existed. But they do exist. Furthermore, they

survive and gradually become part of a lexicon. Forming a context, they give birth to new micro-discourses with their sets of unique elements.

To make our point clear, we will bring an example from a “newly baked” discourse used in the Armenian language: it is a special and unprecedented way of constructing a phrase that expresses *wish*.

The formal, well-known, “rule-friendly” (here, we have used scare quotes to avoid any kind of absolutisms as the main goal of this paper includes the rejection of ‘absolutistic formality’, and so of ‘norms’) construction in Armenian of the word ‘արժեղ/արժեղեսույ’ (‘better to’ and/or ‘to be worth being/doing’) and of other elements looks as follows:

«Արժե՛ղ սի՛ հասն ուտե՛նք / արժե՛ սի՛ հասն  
ուտե՛լ»: *We better eat/have a meal.*

In English, the mot-en-mot translation will be:

*‘It is worth (it) to eat now.’*

This very phrase which today is a fixed discursive (especially in recent years) is being used in an odd and unprecedented manner by native speakers in a slightly different form, that may seem to be an ‘unstable’ discourse and goes as follows:

«Արժե՛ղ սի՛ հասն կե՛րած» - *‘It’s worth eaten’*

To most language carriers this construction may sound very artificial and ‘incorrect’, but our observations tell us that it has already turned into an ‘ordinary’, and ‘accepted’ slang element, a living discourse that is present and in use; perhaps, it is just a matter of time and the creation of literature for this discourse to also become part of the so-called language proper. Thus, when the carrier and moreover scholar-carrier or theorist-carrier changes his/her attitude towards the ‘anomalies’ in DEC<sup>6</sup> and CLR<sup>7</sup> into non-conservative, non-absolutistic, thus – positive ones, the above-mentioned case and other similar cases are regarded as possible results of the socio-lingual *natural* processes.

In other words, the descriptivist scholar/translator/author when meeting such neologies and “mutations” realizes that there is nothing wrong with ‘It’s worth eaten’, nor with other results of element-combination, which occur out of “nowhere” or as a result of certain events in a living, operating, and developing system ‘once’ created for communicative purposes.

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<sup>6</sup> DEC – Domain of Element Creation

<sup>7</sup> CLR – Carrier-Language Relation



### 3.2. “*Lingua Vivus*”<sup>8</sup> or “Who Language Belongs to?”

To answer the question of why we should give so much importance to the discourses being born in a cultural reality, let us revisit the great anti-Roman movement in translation, the translation movement that formed the well-known German school of translation and changed the course of translation in modern Europe.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), German professor of theology, translator, composer, and priest, writes in his “Open Letter on Translating”:

*‘...We do not have to ask the literal Latin how we are to speak German, as these donkeys do. Rather we must ask the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace. We must be guided by their language; by the way they speak and do our translating accordingly. Then they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them...’<sup>9</sup>*

It seems that Luther (being a priest) noticed the conservative approaches in previous translations of the Bible that contradicted the natural development of the language and its purposes. This case is very similar to ours, where the non-scientific, ineffective, limiting approach in message transfer between two or more languages exists and slows down the evolving impact of translation in the development of the target language.

Here, we can analogize the attitudes of those ‘donkeys’ towards ‘literal’ Latin and (in case of the Armenian practice) the attitudes of many translators operating with Armenian, the theorists working towards ‘literal’ Armenian.

To whom does language belong? Who is the ‘neologist’ in a lingual reality who organizes the mutations? The obvious answer is justified by any empirical observation carried out in any ‘lingual environment.’ The answer is *the people* - the carrier of the language. “*People*” is not the sum of non-absolutistically-defined numbers of particular humans, as some scholars may think. The “*people*” is the sum of all socio-cultural layers of a given nation - a kid playing in the yard is “*people*”, a scholar is “*people*”, a soldier, a poet, a scientist, a priest... all of them are “*people*” and all of them appear to be ‘triggers’ for both formally “valid” and “invalid” variables in the function of language.

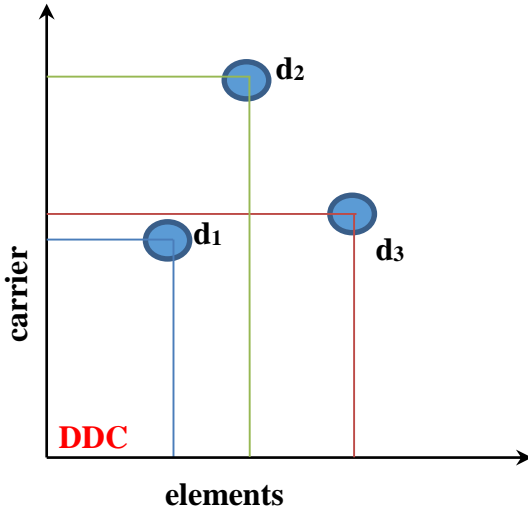
To illustrate the phenomenon of *Lingua Vivus* we provide the diagram below to show how **CDR** (Carrier Discourse Relation) may be implemented via **CER** (Carrier-Element Relation). Starting from the 90° angle formed by the two vectors, the whole inner space is our Domain of Element Creation (DEC), the favorable environment for a “Language” to manifest in an evolving way, in which it develops as a flexible and (both culturally and interculturally) useful? means of communication. In DEC the constant interaction of “*people*” (carriers) and possible lingual elements gives birth to new micro discourses, thus the DEC simultaneously turns into a greater concept – into DDC (Domain of Discourse Creation). Put simply, it starts to be not only about *people*

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<sup>8</sup> Lat. - living language

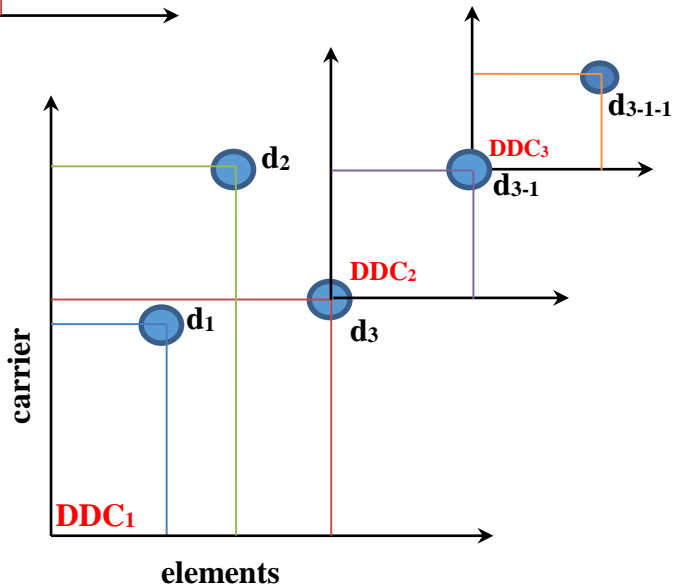
<sup>9</sup> “An Open Letter on Translating” By Martin Luther, 1530 [Translated from “Ein sendbrief D. M. Luthers. Von Dolmetzschchen und Fürbit der heiligenn” by Dr. Gary Mann]

using *elements* to communicate, but about *people creating discourses that* operate in the function of *Lingua Vivus*.



The blue, red and green lines in the graph represent the processes of Carrier-Element Relation (CER), while the blue circles on the crossing points of the lines are the new (micro) discourses generated from the CER.

The discourses can easily expand into other domains with their possible neo-discourses, for instance, into sub-DDCs, which can, in their turn, be pictured by another two-vectored diagram of coordinates creating a 90° angle from the center of the existing blue circles. This process can go on “infinitely”, and in lingual reality it does, otherwise the languages would have been limited systems that are considered stable and constant phenomena, in contradiction to the nature of communication.



*The CER-result ‘d<sub>3</sub>’ [in DDC<sub>(1)</sub>] may give birth to CER-result ‘d<sub>3-1</sub>’ [in sub-DDC / DDC<sub>2</sub>], which, in its turn, may give birth to ‘d<sub>3-1-1</sub>’ [in sub-sub-DDC / DDC<sub>3</sub>] and so on.*

#### 4. Conclusion

The very question of what the language of translation is can be answered differently depending on the socio-cultural reality wherein the translation is carried out; thus, there might not be a solid, everlasting answer to the question what language or langue the translator should use when transferring a message from one language to another. The only fundamental (although maybe quite abstract) answer we can provide is that the language of translation is the language of the users; in other words, the language of translation is *Lingua Vivus*, because the language is *Lingua Vivus*.

The importance of this paper is not based on its correspondence to the contemporary practice of big data analysis commonly involved in any scientific activity. It is rather of philosophical and attitudinal value. It is about approaches and semantic hygiene in methodologies, as well as about understanding and evaluating the relations in the triangle of languages, users, and transfer. Therefore, this paper may serve as a basis of something bigger and may act as a trigger for a new campaign in translation and other social sciences, and lead to newer and more dense works that will include an outlook to turn translation into a more useful tool.

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