# Translation Norms and Universals

Haidar N Mohammed  Ali

Haidar N Mohammed Ali
M.A Translation Studies
University Of Sulaimani

**Abstract** – This paper 'Translation norms and universals' tries to deal with the concepts of norms and universals and their applications within the framework of descriptive translation studies (DTS). The paper, basically, starts with explaining the new notion of descriptive translation studies and how it works significantly in translation discipline on the both theoretical and practical levels, and showing how DTS is important to monitor translation process and assess the product of translation. Throughout the paper, the notions of norms and universals are discussed and the controversial tensions between these two important translational elements are highly focused. Worth mentioning that the research sheds a light on how norms and universals affect the equivalence choices in translation along with the monitoring system of DTS.  In the conclusion, the fall out is that it is important to take those notions into account while we research translation and also when we practice translation activity. Thus, I am going to talk about descriptive translation studies, the norms, universals, and how they correlate together respectively.

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## Introduction

This paper tries to deal with the relationship between the concept of translation universal and translation norms within the framework of descriptive translation studies (DTS).  It is clear that the norms and universals play a main role in descriptive translation studies, as (Toury, 1995:61) states that "it is norms that determine the extent of equivalence in actual translation". This indicates that the concept of equivalence refers to the relationship between the source text and its translation. That's why the concept of norms is very controversial and central, especially in descriptive translation studies. Some believe that the norms, in most of the cases lead the translator to make a different choice comparing with other translations.

At the same time there is also translation universal in the descriptive translation studies, what is the universal is invariable behavior, and there are remarkable tensions and also confusions between these two different translational concepts, as Maruf emphasizes that " translation universals can be referred as a broader limit of the relationship between the source text and the translations, and sometimes it is not easy to differentiate between the universal and the concepts of norms in translation studies"(2007:11). That is to say, the relationship between the norms and universals is biased and controversial within the translation studies. However, they are crucial factors that play an essential role in translation theory and practice, especially for the translators to make their choices under the influence of these cultural and translational values.

Descriptive translation study, as a different approach from the previous translation models, comes to monitor the translation process, analyze the strategies that have been used, and also it deals and researches the outcome of the translation process, which is in most of the cases a translated text, film or a piece of music. What is important here is that the DTS takes two important features into account to investigate translational behavior, which are norms and universals.

For the significance of these essential concepts, and the importance of the translation theory and descriptive translation studies, this essay deals with the nature of the concepts, their relationships and how they work within the descriptive translation studies. Khulusi points out that "translation universals and norms do participate in the theoretical research based activities, and on the practice level in which they put their impact on the choices and transparency of the translation to the readership"(1982:46). This means that it is important to take them into account while we research translation and also when we practice translation activity. Thus, I am going to talk about descriptive translation studies, the norms, universals, and how they correlate together.

## 1- Descriptive Translation Study

### 1.1. The Definition

The descriptive translation study, which is often abbreviated as (DTS), is an empirical branch of translation studies, that deals with the translation as process and product as well, as (Pym, 2010:65-67) argues that descriptive translation study is "a general paradigm in which scholars have set out to describe what translations actually are rather than just prescribe how they should be". He wants to explain that besides descriptive linguistics, there is also a study to describe the process and the products or the strategies have been used in translation. Thus descriptive translation study does not normally limit or restrict the translation process, but it deals with it as a phenomenon or an activity very neutrally.  This

notion was first introduced by (Holmes) in 1972, in his important article "the name and nature of translation studies".(Venute, 2000:175). There were certainly factors to think about this notion, and how it works in the field of translation, especially, when translation is considered as a social or socio-cultural phenomenon or activity.

## 1.2. The Objectives of DTS

It is very significant to know the goals or objectives of the descriptive translation studies, this is important to know how it works on the one hand, and how to research about it on the other hand. As (James.Holmes, 1972) in his article explains that "the descriptive translation study has two main goals, (1) to describe the phenomena of translating and translation(s) as they manifest themselves in the world of our experience, and (2) to establish general principles by means of which these phenomena can be explained and predicted (Venute, ibid). The first point of the objectives is very striking, especially when it says 'they manifest themselves'. It means there is no any rules posed by descriptive translation studies, while previous researches and theories were just focusing on the normativity of the translation, and that was to set rules for the translators, but it is clear that the descriptive translation study wants to analyze the manifestation of the translation process. And the second point is about establishing any good rules or expectations through the translation process experiences, so that is often the translation process and translators choices that will become rules and norms rather than those have been guided by the theories.

So the main agenda of descriptive translation study is basically to investigate and research what translation is "under any defined set of circumstances… and why it is realised the way it is" (Toury 1991:179), this investigation might include the factors that were referred to, so, it is the main role and task of translation studies to show the extent to which the translation researching and translation process might undergo those socio-cultural factors.

(Munday, 2001:112) lists the three steps or stages of this descriptive model which provides a description of the product of the translation process, and the "wider role of the sociocultural system".

1. Situate the text within the target culture system, looking at its significance or acceptability.

2. Compare the ST and the TT for shifts, identifying relationships between 'coupled pairs' of ST and TT segments, and attempting generalizations about the underlying concept of translation.

3. Draw implications for decision-making in future translating.

These three procedures are basically significant, it outlines criteria by which the translated texts are successfully investigated and described, and it looks at the translation with in other products of the target system, so as to know the extent of its importance. DTS also explains the correlation between different translation segments and the level of the shifts occurred in the translation process, and finally the DTS puts sort of outcome of the investigation to provide a sort of advice or helpful tips for the future translations, this is the real act of any description models and very typical.

## 1.3. Translation Study and Equivalence

One of other results of this theory by Toury, is the change in the form and content of the notion of 'equivalence'. It is very clear that before this theory, the main focus in translation theory and practice was on equivalence, and scholars believed that the main basis on which the translation successfulness constructed is equivalence. Although they had different point of views regarding the controversial term of equivalence, in the descriptive theory of translation there is really a new perspective of equivalence, this is when (Toury 1995:86) defines equivalence as " equivalence as it is used here is not one target-source relationship at all, established on the basis of a particular type of invariant. Rather, it is a Functional-relational concept; namely, that set of relationships which will have been found to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate modes of translation performance for the culture in question". Thus A descriptive analysis or research does not focus on whether a target-text segment is 'equivalent' to a source-text segment, but only on the uncovering of translational patterns, and descriptive translation study tries to investigate the choices that have been done by the translator under any translational factors, like 'norms', ;universals' or other factors that affect those certain choices.

One should not just focus on evaluating the semantic or even only cultural aspects of each translational segment individually, and make a decision whether it is appropriate or not. The descriptive translation study rather concentrates on the strategies and methods that produced the translation, which is the core of the translation process. In other words, once a text is published or pretended as the translation of another text, it is, accepted as equivalent to the ST. So, as (Gentzler, 1993:128) explains "translation equivalence becomes a fact, an empirical matter, to be analysed rather than assessed against the ST for a presumed or ideal correctness, and translated texts exist as 'replacements' of specific ST in the receiving culture". So the idea is to describe them, trying to identify possible regular patterns (norms) that govern decisions in translation. The aim is not to judge a TT as correct or incorrect, accepted or unaccepted. That is to say the equivalence is existing wherever there is translation, it is the

products of the translation process, from here, the world view of translation and equivalence researchers change and vary, as they will try to elucidate the mechanisms which produced the equivalence and took part in the process. One of the central points in the DTS is the notion of norms.

## 2- Norms

Norms have been introduced first into the field of translation by Gideon Toury, in his book *descriptive translation studies and beyond, in (1995)*. It was basically the beginning of considering norms by the investigations of descriptive translation studies. This term and any dimensions it has, in deed, difficult to explain, since on should first consider the translation act or event as a socio-cultural phenomenon, that is to say translation as the other social activities and events has it's own expectations by the community that participate in translation or the readership in this cross-cultural process.

To define the norms, there might be different perspectives. (Malmkjær, 2005. in Stafford and Scott 1986: 81) stated that norms can be defined as "shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time". From this definition, norms are tendencies of behaving in a certain way, or expectations of what might be a treatment in a certain community or among a group, this is, in face, vary in different cultures, societies and situations with the passage of time. It is clear that norms are more flexible than rules.

Since the existence controversies about the distinction between the norms and rules, (Toury, 1995: 62) believes that "It is basically between two different trends, which are absolute rules and idiosyncrasy". From that definition, one can take other factors into consideration while observing the norms in researching translation studies theories, and also for the translators how to deal with the norms in the translation practice. Also Toury wants to explain that norms are not necessarily the same as rules or restrict methodology.

Toury divides the norms and introduces them as three different kinds that influence the translation process. Initial norms are concerned with the question that whether a translator moves towards the norms of the ST or to the norms of the TT. Toury states that "If a translation is source-text oriented the TT will be adequate, whereas a target-text oriented approach will result in an acceptable translation" (1995:56). Another kind of norms that Toury points out is preliminary norms; they are about the mechanism of choosing the texts or any product to be translated into the target culture, and what is the extent of the importance of that translation in the target system. Toury also describes operational norms which are concerned with the relocation, omission or addition of passages in a translation, and analysing individual items of a text to make it much more clear since he talks about this kind of norm as "they govern the selection of material to formulate

the target text in, or replace the original textual and linguistic material with" (ibid: 59)

There are different points of views and interpretations from the translation scholars, about this notion of norms, (Hussainy, 2009:72) concentrates that "Norms are not very fixed, they can be internal socio-cultural values by which different interpretations of the target text can emerge, and it can also be considered in a broader sense, towards a very district rule". It means that sometimes norms are assimilated by the individuals, different socio-cultural backgrounds might be seen for different individuals, so it varies according to the time and place in which translation even happens, that is why the norms are also under the influence of the societies and cultures, and there are so many examples, especially on the practice level of the translation.

## 3- Universals

### 3.1. DTS and Universals

Translation universal is another outcome that has been introduced by DTS, this was after the studying of norms and it's implications by DTS. There are, in deed, still many controversies around this notion and the basic features of the translation universals. Like (toury, 1995: 268) points to two main 'probabilistic' laws of translation. The first law is the law of **growing standardization**', and the second law is the law of **interference**. The first law is concerned with that the styles and linguistic or textual features of the source text and culture are sort of assimilated, while the latter refers to the fact of copying some source text features into the target language and culture through the translated text. In the texts translated, for example, from English into Kurdish, they are mostly standardised towards the source language and culture. This is really due to the tendency of purifying the language and establishing a standardized language, in this way translation can have a positive role.

(Baker. et al, 1993: 243) defines translation universals as "features which typically occur in translated texts rather than original utterances and which are not the result of interference from specific linguistic systems". Baker wants to emphasize on the notion of the universals from the very specific point of view, as if the universals are very specific to the translated texts, and neglected the interference between different linguistic systems. This means that there might be normally some features whether linguistic, cultural or textual, seen in the translated texts which cannot be available in the original texts of the same language. One may find the expression of (be shewayaky asaiy) so many times in a text translated from English into Kurdish, while it cannot be seen very regularly in Kurdish original texts.

There may be different arguments about this idea, while (Mauranen, 2000:66. in Toury, 1995:275) states that "in translation phenomena, pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to be transferred to the target text". This may be basically another perspective of universality, that the interference is occurred very regularly.

## 3.2. The Features of Universals

According to ( Olohan, 2004: 91-100), there are four universal features of translation universals:
- Simplification: the idea that translators simplify the language or message or both. So in translated texts sometimes the translator wants to take the readership very seriously into account, and simplify the texts, especially when the readership is from a specific cultural and educational background.
- Explicitation: refers to spelling things out rather than leave them implicit in translation, to make the message and the translation more explicit.
- Normalization: the tendency to conform to patterns and practices which are typical of the target language, even to the point of exaggerating them.
- Leveling out: a hypothesis that translated language and translated texts 'steer a middle course between any two extremes, converging towards the centre'.

The above mentioned candidates for universals can be seen somehow clearly in translated corpora more regular than any original texts.

Two other universal hypothesis by baker (ibid) are:
- Reduction of repetition: she means that a translator may reduce some repeated expressions from the source text and does not tend to translate them into target text.
- lengthening: it is very common that almost always translated texts are longer than the source text, and this may also be similar to any languages.

Those are the universals observed by DTS, in both translation researching and practical process, the observations and investigations by DTS introduces those features, and there may be other universal candidates on the level of lexical patterning and lexical or word pairing representations, but the notion of universals is still controversial.

## Conclusion

To summarize, dealing with the descriptive translation studies, norms and universals, from different point of views, is very important, and has become one of the essential sub-fields of translation studies, on both theoretical and practical level. Depending on the different sources and different scholars' point of views, it has become clear that:

Norms play an important role in translation, since, in the first place, translation is a cross-cultural activity that is shared by different culture and backgrounds, and this makes norms be very seriously accounted. And the translators are better to keep in mind the implication of norms and the mechanisms to abide them as much as possible, that is in order to render the translated message between two different cultures clearly and avoid being lost, so as to make the message and the translation activity acceptable in the target language culture and readership.

Universals, as were discussed, the common characteristics of the language system, and then become significant factors in the translation studies and translation process, as translation is a linguistic event. There were some candidates introduced as being universals, although some of them may refer better to the notion of norms, as this is basically controversial. From this point of view translators should always be aware that there are shared and common features in languages, and in the competence of the individuals, there are also translation universal features that should be highlighted. This might help them how to deal with the different linguistic and translational items.

The tensions between norms, universals and language interference between different linguistic and cultural systems is really worth researching, and it has been concluded that there are different point of views, at the same time the DTS set out some candidates and features as norms and universals.

Finally, it is very important that one can observe the implications of norms and universals through descriptive translation studies, to make sure how they work in different circumstances, and how they are applied among different languages, while the process of translation. Descriptive translation studies told us that norms and universals do work very curiously and they really need to be researched and observed.

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