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# Revisiting Newmark's Theory of Translation: To What Extent Is It Appropriate?

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## **ABSTRACT**

Newmark's idea has been widely used in translator training courses and combines a wealth of practical examples of linguistic theories of meaning with practical applications for translation. This research used content analysis method to investigate Newmark's notable books and journal articles from the earliest (1977) to the latest (2009). Despite Newmark's well-known practical implementation of translation, this research revealed that his theory seems to have a deficiency as it does not pay attention to the role of translators. Therefore, the translation theory needs to be broadened to take into account the value-driven of the human yardstick framework. It is concluded that Newmark's theory lacks some important criteria to reach appropriate translation in some cases. Finally, the "Appropriateness Theory" proposed by Woesler (2021) comes to perfect the previous theories and to meet the demands of this twenty-first century translation where it becomes more complex (e.g., political agenda).

## 1. Introduction

Peter Newmark is one of the most influential theorists of translation. He is also one of the founders of the Institute of Linguists and a fervent advocate for the professionalization of translators (Panou, 2013). Newmark was once a professor of Translation and dean of the School of Modern Languages at the Royal Polytechnic Institution (now the University of Westminster). He taught the theory and practice of translation between German and English and later taught at the University of Surrey. His opinions on translation theory were mostly reflected in papers published between the 1970s and 1990s, some of which were compiled into collections (Panou, 2013).

Approaches to Translation, his most important work, was published in 1981, some of his other works include About Translation, 1991, Paragraphs on translation, 1993, More paragraphs on Translation, 1998, and A Textbook of Translation, 1988. Newmark's works involve a wide range of problems, and their contents are numerous and complex. Newmark devoted himself to studying the past and present of Western translation. By describing the

ideas of various schools, he extensively discussed the relationship between translation and other disciplines, putting forward his own views on this basis (Munday, 2016).

Newmark's works do not aim to promote any monolithic translation theory but rather attempt to describe a basis for dealing with problems encountered during the translation process. More specifically, Newmark replaces Nida's (1964) terms of formal and dynamic equivalence with semantic and communicative translation respectively. The major difference between the two types of translation proposed by Newmark is that semantic translation focuses on meaning whereas communicative translation concentrates on effect. In other words, the semantic translation looks back at the Source Text (ST) and tries to retain its characteristics as much as possible. Its nature is more complex and detailed and there is also a tendency to over-translate. On the other hand, the communicative translation looks towards the needs of the addressees, thus trying to satisfy them as much as possible (Pym, 2014). In this respect, communicative translation tends to under-translate; to be smoother, more direct, and easier to read. Hence, in semantic translation, a great emphasis is placed on the author of the original text whereas communicative translation is meant to serve a larger readership. It should be pointed out that during the translation process, communicative translation need not be employed exclusively over semantics or vice versa. It may well be the case in a literary text that a particular sentence requires communicative translation whereas another sentence from the same text may require a semantic one. Therefore, the two methods of the translation may be used in parallel, with varying focuses where each is employed.

It can be witnessed that Newmark's theory on translation by time follows the mainstream of translation studies where the concentration has been shifted from audience to the intention of the translator, from the intention to the source author, from the source author to the target audience. However, in more recent years, translation practice turns to be more important and complex. Moratto and Woesler (2021) emphasize the code of ethics in translation to make the translation more appropriate. Therefore, it is important to revisit Newmark's theory of translation to figure out whether it is still appropriate in this twenty-first century translation. By studying Newmark's works, it is expected that they will contribute to the translation theory and practice adjusted to the current demand for translation. Eventually, the translation practice is more appropriate.

# 2. Research Methodology

This research used the content analysis method to investigate Newmark's theory of translation. Ary et al. (2010) state that content or document analysis is a research method applied to written or visual materials to identify specified characteristics of the materials. One of the reasons why this research used content analysis is that it is unobtrusive. That is to say, the presence of the observer/researcher does not influence what is being observed (Ary et al., 2010). The followings were the steps involved in the content analysis of this research:

- Specifying the phenomenon to be investigated
- Selecting the media from which the observations are to be made
- Formulating exhaustive and mutually exclusive coding categories
- Deciding on the sampling plan to be used
- Training the coders
- Analyzing the data

## 3. Findings and Discussion

## 3.1 Newmark's Semantic and Communicative Translation

Peter Newmark (1916–2011) tackled the notion of equivalence by asking if a translation should try to remain as close as possible to the source language or if it should, instead, aim to be free and idiomatic. He called these two approaches semantic translation and communicative translation respectively.

## 3.1.1 Semantic Translation

Semantic translation differs from "faithful translation" only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value (that is, the beautiful and natural sounds of the Source Language (SL) text, compromising on "meaning" where appropriate so that no assonance, word-play or repetition jars in the finished version. Further, it may translate less important cultural words by culturally neutral third or functional terms but not by cultural equivalents. The distinction between "faithful" and "semantic" translation is that the first is uncompromising and dogmatic, while the second is more flexible, admits the creative exception to 100% fidelity, and allows for the translator's intuitive empathy with the original (Newmark, 1988). The semantic kind of translation would look back to the formal values of the start text and retain them as much as possible.

This is the sample of semantic translation: (German) bissiger hund and (French) chien méchant would be translated into: (English) dog that bites or savage dog

(French) défense de marchér sur le gazon would be translated into:

(English) walking on the turf is forbidden or It is forbidden to walk on the turf. (Newmark, 1977: 178).

It is readable but remains with the original culture and assists the reader only in its connotations if they constitute the essential message of the text. It tends to be more complex, more awkward, more detailed, and tends to over-translate, which is more specific than the original in transferring nuances of meaning. It is in line with Newmark's (1981) principle that semantic translation relates to the word or the word group.

# 3.1.2 Communicative Translation

Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original (Newmark, 1981). It must emphasize the force rather than the content of the message. It is likely to be smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct, more conventional, tending to under-translate, which means using more generic terms in difficult passages. Communicative translation relates to the sentence (Newmark, 1981).

Here is a sample of the communicative translation:

(German) bissiger hund and (French) chien méchant would be translated into: (English) Beware of the dog!

(French) défense de marchér sur le gazon would be simply translated into: (English) keep off the grass (Newmark, 1977).

The communicative translation would look forward to the needs of the new addressee, adapting to their needs as much as necessary. Newmark's preferences tend to lie on the "semantic" side, especially with respect to what he terms "authoritative texts" (Newmark, 1997). In theory, however, translators can choose whether to render one aspect or another. There is no necessary assumption of just one "natural" equivalent, and the result is a generally directional theory.

# 3.2 A Critical Evaluation of Newmark's Work

The description of communicative translation looks like Nida's dynamic equivalence in the effect it is trying to create on the TL reader, while semantic translation has been almost the same as Nida's formal equivalence. Nevertheless, Newmark distances himself from the full principle of equivalent effect, since that effect "is inoperative if the text is out of TL space and time" (Newmark, 1981). An example would be a modern British English translation of Homer. No modern translator, irrespective of the TL, can hope or expect to produce the same effect on the reader of the written TL as the oral SL had on its listeners in ancient Greece. Newmark (1981) also raises further questions concerning the readers to whom Nida directs his dynamic equivalence, asking if they are "to be handed everything on a plate", with everything explained for them.

Newmark indicates that semantic translation differs from literal translation in that it "respects context", interprets and even explains (metaphors, for instance). On the opposite, literal translation means word-for-word in its extreme version and, even in its weaker form, sticks very closely to ST lexis and syntax. Importantly, as long as an equivalent effect is achieved, Newmark holds literal translation to be the best approach. In communicative as in semantic translation, provided that equivalent effect is secured, the literal word-for-word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation (Newmark, 1981).

The comparison of Newmark's semantic and communicative translation can be seen in the following table:

Parameter	Semantic translation	Communicative translation
Transmitter/addressee focus	Focus on the thought processes of the transmitter as an individual; should only help TT reader with connotations if they are a crucial part of message	Subjective, TT reader focused, oriented towards a specific language and culture
Culture	Remains within the SL culture	Transfers foreign elements into the TL culture
Time and origin	Not fixed in any time or local space; translation needs to be done anew with every generation	Ephemeral and rooted in its own contemporary context
Relation to ST	Always 'inferior' to ST; 'loss' of meaning	May be 'better' than the ST, but overriding 'loyalty' to TL norms
Use of form of SL	If ST language norms deviate,	Respect for the form of the SL,

Table 1: Newmark's semantic and communicative translation

	then this must be replicated in TT; 'loyalty' to ST author	but overriding 'loyalty' to TL norms
Form of TL	More complex, awkward, detailed, concentrated, tendency to overtranslate	Smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct, more conventional; tendency to undertranslate
Appropriateness	autobiography, 'personal	For the vast majority of texts, e.g. non-literary writing, technical and informative texts, publicity, standardized types, popular fiction
Criterion for evaluation	Accuracy of reproduction of the significance of ST	Accuracy of communication of ST message in TT

Although Newmark's idea has been widely used on translator training courses and combines a wealth of practical examples of linguistic theories of meaning with practical applications for translation, his terms semantic translation and communicative translation have generally received far less discussion than Nida's formal and dynamic equivalence. This may be because, despite Newmark's relevant criticisms of equivalent effect, they raise some of the same points concerning the translation process and the importance of the target text reader. One of the difficulties encountered by translation studies in systematically following up advances, in theory, may indeed be partly attributable to the overabundance of terminology. Newmark himself, for instance, defines Juliane House's pair of "overt" and "covert" translation in terms of his own semantic and communicative translation (Newmark, 1981) and considers communicative translation to be "identical" to Nida's functional or dynamic equivalence (Newmark, 2009).

Newmark has been criticized for his strong prescriptivism, and the language of his evaluations still bears traces of what he himself called the "pre-linguistic era" of translation studies: translations are "smooth" or "awkward", while translation itself is an "art" (if semantic) or a "craft" (if communicative) (Munday, 2016). Nevertheless, a large number of examples in Newmark's work provide ample guidance and advice for the trainee, and many of the questions he tackles are of important practical relevance to translation. It should also be noted that in his later discourse, he emphasized the aesthetic principles of writing, the difference between "social, non-literary" and "authoritative and serious" translation, and an ethical and truth-seeking function for translation.

Newmark's communicative translation which resembles Nida's dynamic equivalence may result in contradiction with natural equivalence. Qian Hu (1993) gives an example of the effect of word order in Chinese and English in the words of animal, vegetable, mineral, and monster. The closest Chinese equivalents are dòng wù, zhí wù, kuàng wù and guài wù. These all happen to contain the character wù, meaning "object" (thus, dòng wù means "moving object", hence animal). If these Chinese equivalents are chosen, such an unintended cohesive link would lead to what Qian Hu terms "over translation". Qian Hu also discusses cultural references, and the argument recalls the kind of criticism that has surrounded a notorious example where Nida's dynamic equivalence and Newmark's communicative translation consider that give one another a hearty handshake all around quite naturally translates the early Christian greet one another with a holy kiss. While some may feel the loss of the source culture term or custom, such cultural adaptation is far from unusual. It is

witnessed, for example, by Arabic translations of Harry Potter that translate "she kissed him on the cheek" by she waved at him and said, "Good-bye, Harry" (Dukmak, 2012).

## 3.3 Newmark's Waiver on Ethics of Translation

Peter Newmark mentions appropriateness (see the table above) as the parameter of semantic and communicative translation, but unfortunately, it limits only to the levels of content, semantics, grammar, the situation of the principal, translator, and reader. This twenty-first-century translation demands beyond those levels. It is stated by Woesler (2021) that the translation concern should be broadened to the human yardsticks, that is to say, human dignity and ethics come into play. Not to say that Newmark doesn't concern about ethics at all in translation. He indeed mentions it, still, there are no practical guidelines on how ethics have a role in translation.

Furthermore, Venuti (1998) insists that the scope of translation studies needs to be broadened to take account of the value-driven nature of the socio-cultural framework. Thus, the contests Toury's "scientific" descriptive model with its aim of producing "value-free" norms and laws of translation:

Toury's method must still turn to cultural theory to assess the significance of the data, to analyze the norms. Norms may be in the first instance linguistic or literary, but they will also include a diverse range of domestic values, beliefs, and social representations which carry ideological force in serving the interests of specific groups. And they are always housed in the social institutions where translations are produced and enlisted in cultural and political agendas (Venuti, 1998).

In addition to governments and other politically motivated institutions, which may decide to censor or promote certain works, the groups and social institutions to which Venuti refers would include the various players in the publishing industry as a whole. Above all, these would be the publishers and editors who choose the works and commission the translations, pay the translators, and often dictate the translation method. They also include the literary agents, marketing and sales teams, and reviewers. The reviewers' comments indicate and to some extent determine how translations are read and received in the target culture. Each of these players has a particular position and role within the dominant cultural and political agendas of their time and place. The translators themselves are part of that culture, which they can either accept or rebel against (Munday, 2016).

Much-discussed publications have been the essays of Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti that differ in some aspects but agree on the idea of emphasizing the differences between source and target language and culture when translating. Both are interested in how the "cultural other [...] can best preserve [...] that otherness" (Venuti, 1995). In more recent studies, scholars have applied Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical work on ethics and subjectivity on this issue (Larkosh, 2004). As his publications have been interpreted in different ways, various conclusions on his concept of ethical responsibility have been drawn from this. Some have come to the assumption that the idea of translation itself could be ethically doubtful, while others receive it as a call for considering the relationship between author or text and translator as more interpersonal, thus making it an equal and reciprocal process.

Parallel to these studies, the general recognition of the translator's responsibility has increased. More and more translators and interpreters are being seen as active participants

in geopolitical conflicts, which raises the question of how to act ethically independent from their own identity or judgment. This leads to the conclusion that translating and interpreting cannot be considered solely as a process of language transfer, but also as socially and politically directed activities (Inghilleri & Maier, 2001).

There is general agreement on the need for an ethical code of practice providing some guiding principles to reduce uncertainties and improve professionalism, as having been stated in other disciplines (for example military medical ethics or legal ethics). However, as there is still no clear understanding of the concept of ethics in this field, opinions about the particular appearance of such a code vary considerably.

Ethics cannot be neglected in translation as they have significant output in the end. They relate to choices made by the translator in order to expand the receiving culture's range. It is stated by Venutti (2008) in his dichotomy that the terms "domestication" and "foreignization" indicate fundamentally ethical attitudes towards a foreign text and culture, ethical effects produced by the choice of a text for translation and by the strategy devised to translate it, whereas the terms like "fluency" and "resistance" indicate fundamentally discursive features of translation strategies in relation to the reader's cognitive processing.

Translators ethically stand above ideologies or other discrimination and do not contribute to human rights violations (Woesler, 2021). The case is, for example, translating a racist joke. Ethically, a translator should think critically about this question: "Is it appropriate to tell a standard joke in the target language when the country leader has told a racist joke in the source language?". If the translator or interpreter does not pay attention to the code of ethics, he will deliberately translate the joke as it is without considering the effect on the target reader or listener. In fact, this practice is semantically or communicatively acceptable, but it is not appropriate as it contains discrimination which leads to human rights violations. In conclusion, it would be ethically reprehensible and might be correct for the principal under Newmark's theory, but not under the Appropriateness theory.

## 3.4 Appropriateness Theory

# 3.4.1 Principles of Appropriateness Theory

"Appropriateness Theory" is the ultimate theory of all translation theories. There may be various answers to the question of appropriateness in different times and from different actors, perspectives, disciplines, etc. (Moratto & Woesler, 2021). An evaluation of the appropriateness of a translation can only be relative and never absolute. Thus, it is necessary to establish a system of evaluation, valuing the different aspects such as the function of the text, loyalty to the author, the ideals of literal or free translation, and how far a translation can "work" in the target language (Moratto & Woesler, 2021).

Translation and interpreting theories can each explain particularly well individual aspects of translation processes and the creation of target texts. This allows the existing theories to be used eclectically. In addition, the eclectic use must be supplemented with enrichment by the final judgment possibility of all theories on super-ordinate categories such as ethics and human dignity in the form of the theory of "appropriateness" (Woesler, 2021).

According to the appropriateness theory, however, a line of conflict arises with regard to the user's being at the mercy of the principal, both of whom may pursue different interests. Appropriateness theory, as an integrative theory, accepts all existing translation theories for certain aspects of the translation process. It is as requested by Mary Snell-Hornby in 1988

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that all theories need to be seen together as one (Moratto & Woesler, 2021). Furthermore, it poses the question of to what extent a translation can be called "appropriate" in certain sub-aspects and as a whole (Woesler, 2021).

Thus, this theory goes beyond the previous theories that measure the correctness of a translation by the content, semantics, grammar, situation of the principal, translator, and reader. Here, an overall assessment is asked for, in which the principal, the equivalence in the source and the target culture or the effect in the target culture are no longer a measure of translation quality. These translations must also be measured against even more general, human yardsticks. And this is where human dignity and ethics come into play (Woesler, 2021).

# 3.4.2 Suggested Ways to Reach Appropriateness

Appropriateness Theory uses existing theories and adds additional criteria like ethics, seeing the whole picture to reach appropriateness (Woesler, 2021). The Appropriateness Theory is complex and shows us that a Code of Ethics needs to be established. Here are some fundamental questions for appropriateness that actually leads us to fundamental ethical questions:

- 1. should you report things you overheard from the foreign negotiation team to your own team to enhance your own team's chances?
- 2. is it appropriate to take over the role of a negotiation participant when you were hired for interpreting?
- 3. is it appropriate to tell a standard joke in the target language when the country leader has told a racist joke in the source language?
- 4. what implications does it have about the foreign country's leader, when he laughs about the interpreter's standard joke, but the country leader of the source language thinks he laughed about his racist joke?
- 5. is it appropriate to translate propaganda and to interpret for a dictator?
- 6. is it appropriate to translate the order "Feuer!" [Shoot!] into French if the French collaborating soldiers would commit a crime against humanity when they understood and executed the order?
- 7. what responsibilities do interpreters and translators have?

In addition to fundamental questions for appropriateness, Venuti's general premises about foreignizing and domesticating translation practices, and the invisibility of the translator and the relative power of the publisher and the translator, can be useful to reach appropriate translation. Venuti (in Munday, 2016) states that they can be done by:

- 1. comparing ST and TT linguistically for signs of foreignizing and domesticating practices;
- 2. interviewing the translators about their strategies and/or researching what the translators say they are doing, their correspondence with the authors, and the different drafts of a translation if available;
- 3. interviewing the publishers, editors, and agents to see what their aims are in publishing translations, how they choose which books to translate and what instructions they give to translators;

- 4. looking at how many books are translated and sold, which ones are chosen and into which languages, and how trends vary over time;
- 5. looking at the kind of translation contracts that are made and how "visible" the translator is in the final product;
- 6. seeing how literally "visible" the fact of translation is, looking at the packaging of the text, the appearance or otherwise of the translator's name on the title page, the copyright assignation, translators' prefaces, correspondence, etc.;
- 7. analyzing the reviews of a translation, author, or period. The aim would be to see what mentions are made of the translators (are they "visible"?) and by what criteria reviewers (and the literary "élite") judge translations at a given time and in a given culture.

Last but not least, Berman's (2012) "twelve deforming tendencies" can remarkably contribute to appropriate translation. They are listed below:

- 1. Rationalization: This mainly entails the modification of syntactic structures including punctuation and sentence structure and order. An example would be translations of Dostoevsky which remove some of the repetition and simplify complex sentence structures. Berman also refers to the abstractness of rationalization and the tendency to generalization.
- 2. Clarification: This includes exploitation, which "aims to render "clear" what does not wish to be clear in the original" (Berman, 2012).
- 3. Expansion: Like other theorists (for example, Vinay and Darbelnet), Berman says that TTs tend to be longer than STs. This is due to "empty" explicitation that unshapes its rhythm, to "over translation" and to "flattening". These additions only serve to reduce the clarity of the work's "voice".
- 4. Ennoblement: This refers to the tendency on the part of certain translators to "improve" on the original by rewriting it in a more elegant style. The result, according to Berman (2012), is an annihilation of the oral rhetoric and formless polylogic of the ST. Equally destructive is the opposite a TT that is too "popular" in its use of colloquialisms.
- 5. Qualitative impoverishment: This is the replacement of words and expressions with TT equivalents "that lack their sonorous richness or, correspondingly, their signifying or "iconic" features" (Berman, 2012). By "iconic", Berman means terms whose form and sound are in some way associated with their sense. An example he gives is the word butterfly and its corresponding terms in other languages.
- 6. Quantitative impoverishment: This is a loss of lexical variation in translation. Berman gives the example of a Spanish ST that uses three different synonyms for face (*semblante*, *rostro*, and *cara*); rendering them all as the face would involve loss.
- 7. The destruction of rhythms: Although more common in poetry, rhythm is still important to the novel and can be "destroyed" by deformation of word order and punctuation.
- 8. The destruction of underlying networks of signification: The translator needs to be aware of the network of words that are formed throughout the text. Individually, these words may not be significant, but they add an underlying uniformity and sense to the text. Examples are augmentative suffixes in a Latin American text jaulón ("large cage"), portón ("large door", etc.).

- g. The destruction of linguistic patternings: While the ST may be systematic in its sentence constructions and patternings, translation tends to be "a systematic" (Berman, 2012). The translator often adopts a range of techniques, such as rationalization, clarification, and expansion, all of which standardize the TT. This is actually a form of incoherence since standardization destroys the linguistic patterns and variations of the original.
- 10. The destruction of vernacular networks or their exoticization: This relates especially to local speech and language patterns which play an important role in establishing the setting of a novel. Examples would include the use of diminutives in Spanish, Portuguese, German and Russian or of Australian English terms and cultural items (outback, bush, dingo, wombat). There is a severe loss if these are erased, yet the traditional solution of exoticizing some of these terms by, for example, placing them in italics, isolates them from the co-text. Alternatively, seeking a TL vernacular or slang equivalent to the SL is a ridiculous exoticization of the foreign. Such would be the case if an Australian farmer were made to speak Bavarian in a German translation.
- 11. The destruction of expressions and idioms: Berman considers the replacement of an idiom or proverb by its TL "equivalent" to be an "ethnocentrism": "to play with "equivalence" is to attack the discourse of the foreign work", he says (Berman, 2012). Thus, an English idiom from Joseph Conrad containing the name of the well-known London mental health hospital Bedlam, should not be translated by Charenton, a similar French institution, since this would result in a TT that produces a new network of French cultural references.
- 12. The effacement of the superimposition of languages: By this, Berman means the way translation tends to erase traces of different forms of language that co-exist in the ST. These may be the mix of American English and varieties of Latin American Spanish in the work of new Latino/a writers, the blends of Anglo-Indian writing, the proliferation of language influences in Joyce's Finnegan's Wake, different sociolects and idiolects, and so on. Berman (2012) considers this to be the "central problem" in the translation of novels.

All of these ways can only be relative and never absolute. Therefore, it is necessary to look into the function of the text, the loyalty to the author, the ideals of literal/free translation, and how far a translation can "work" in the target language.

# 5. Conclusion

Peter Newmark's papers and works have been widely used on translator training courses and combine a wealth of practical examples of linguistic theories of meaning with practical applications for translation. Yet Newmark departs from Nida's receptor-oriented line. He feels that the success of equivalent effect is "illusory" and that "the conflict of loyalties, the gap between emphasis on the source and target language, will always remain as the overriding problem in translation theory and practice". Newmark affirmed his belief that "translation is a noble, truth-seeking activity, and that it should normally be accurate". In taking that stance, Newmark was certainly traditionalist and willfully unsophisticated, not to say technically wrong. Furthermore, Newmark suggests narrowing the gap by replacing the old terms with those of "semantic" and "communicative" translation which actually leads to an overabundance of terminology to some extent. Besides, in this twenty-first century, Newmark's theory seems to have a deficiency as it does not pay attention to the role of the translators. Therefore, the translation theory needs to be broadened to take account of the value-driven of socio-cultural framework. Eventually, the Appropriateness

Theory suggested by Martin Woesler comes to integrate all translation theories for certain aspects of the translation process to meet the demands of twenty-first-century translation.

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