

Skopos's Functional Approach To Translation: Relevance And Practicality In Modern Translation Studies

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to thoroughly investigate, that to translation of what genre of texts, Skopos theory is applied, as, there has been a lot of criticism on the theory, for its limitations and drawbacks, that it is not suitable for translation of literary and religious texts.

The paper also examines the significance, place and practicality of Skopos theory in the modern Translation Studies in depth. This article also, encompasses the role of translation commission or brief, translator and target reader in the process of translation under the tenet of Skopos theory.

In addition to that, the paper illustrates what translation techniques could be deployed in accordance with Skopos theory taking into consideration **linguistic** and **extra-linguistic factors**. To know the gist of essence of this theory, examples have been taken from Russian Literary and Non-Literary Texts.

Keywords: Translation studies, scientific discipline, purpose, translation brief, translation techniques, linguistic factors, extra-linguistic factors.

The Scientific Period, since its beginning in the second half of the 20th century, has encountered the emergence of a series of Translation Theories, which has significantly contributed to establish Translation Studies, as a scientific discipline.

One among such theories is, **German Linguist and Translator Han Josef Vermeer's "Skopos theory"**. Through this theory, Vermeer attempted to demonstrate that translation is not mere a linguistic operation but beyond that.

First reference to this theory could be traced in Vermeers's research paper published in the 1978 edition of the German journal "**Lebende Sprachen**" (Nord, 2012, 26-42).

The term Skopos itself indicates "**Aim**" or "**Purpose**", as it is derived from a Greek word "**σκοπός**" (Nord, 2018, 39), which implies "**Purpose**". **Skopos theory as a functional theory** states, that every human action has a purpose. Since translation is also an action; therefore, it too serves some purpose.

Accordingly, the theory emphasizes, that in order to ensure **equivalence** and **adequacy** in translation, the **Target Text** (TT) should achieve a certain purpose (assigned by **translation commission** or **brief**) in the target language and culture, meeting the needs and expectations of the target audience.

Proponents of Skopos theory see the theory as an attempt to primarily dethrone the predominance of **source text** (ST) in translation (Schaffner, 1998, p. 237). Unlikely, the previous translation theories that considered ST as **sacred** one i.e. under which translators are usually skeptical about bringing in the changes to ST while translating it.

Also, in accordance with the previous theories (**most of them are linguistics-based equivalence theories**) any bids and actions to bring changes to ST in translation are regarded as violations against the translation ethics, a translator is supposed to abide by.

Under the postulates of Skopos theory deviations from the source text's intricacies could often be seen

in translation. In the framework of Skopos theory, all sorts of **omission, addition, modification, adaptation** and **transformation** of ST are quite evident because the translator's foremost objective, which is to abide with the translation commission, is to produce TT that is suitable for different readers and functions accordingly in his different social & cultural environment.

In comparison with other translation theories, the approach of Skopos theory is quiet distinct. For instance, all translations have purpose but unlike translations, which are performed in general, the purpose of translation in consonance with **Skopos theory is more centric to a certain group of people or readers.**

Peculiarity of translational action under the tenet of Skopos could be understood more precisely diagrammatically:

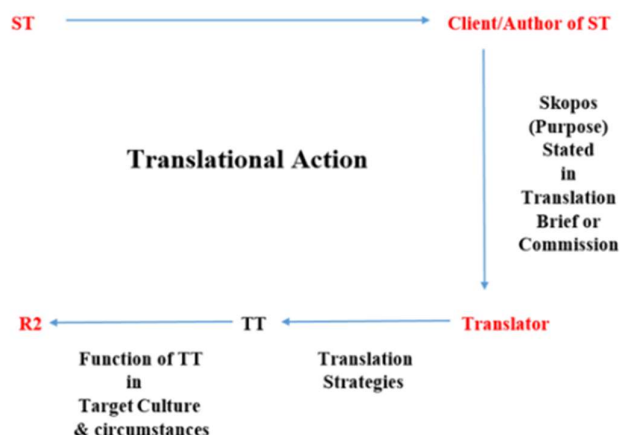


Figure – 1ST – Source Text,

TT – Target Text,

R2 – Target Reader

The diagram highlights the **role of the participants, nature and process of translational action** under Skopos theory. The diagram also points out, that in accordance with the theory; there should always be “**an initiator**” of a translational action (Zeynalzadeh, 2022) i.e. the person who commissions a translation task. That could be any individual (client) or an author of ST himself or in certain cases a translator himself.

To understand the gist of Skopos's translational approach, I would like to bring an example of a translation task commissioned to me in 2020 by a private market research company in India (*Initiator of the translational action in this case*). The company was working on a project to conduct a survey in Russian market to know how many people in Russia consume E-Cigarettes, Vapes, & other Electronic Nicotine Delivery System (ENDS) Products and what health issues Russians face using these products.

An image of an excerpt of the document translated by me from Russian into English is given below to have a better understanding of function and application of Skopos theory:

1. Бросать	Quit
2. Бросаем курить	Quit smoking - <u>We quit smoking*</u>
3. Болезнь	Disease
4. Болезни	Disease - <u>Diseases*</u>
5. Рисуем	Risk - <u>We risk...</u> *
6. Курить	Smoke
7. Курил	Smoke - <u>I/he smoked*</u>
8. Курила	Smoke - <u>She smoked*</u>
9. Курили	Smoke - <u>They smoked*</u>
10. Нагревать	Heat
11. Нагреваем табак	Heat tobacco - <u>We heat tobacco*</u>
12. Нагрев табак	Heat tobacco - <u>Having heated tobacco...</u> *
13. Нагревательный табак	Heat tobacco - <u>Heating tobacco*</u>

Table- 1 Since the intended receiver of the translation i.e. the company's employees were English-speaking people, hence I was asked to provide translation of the terms into English without declension of *English nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs*, as per their *gender, number, cases* and also verbs *without conjugating them* and also *not to change their forms even in past and future tenses*. So that, in future if the employees come across the similar Russian terms, they could guess their meaning. Taking note of the need of the client, I had to translate the words without declining them. In the above table, we could see that some Russian terms have two versions of translation: Translation without underline is what had been asked by the client and underlined translation indicates that the terms had to be translated this way to ensure adequacy of translation.

Below are some more examples of translations done using Skopos theory's translation approach: Generally Skopos theory is widely used to translate titles of **Movies, TV Serials, Literary Works, Names of Brands, Products, Commodities** and also **Advertisements** to give them a sort of **Domestic Flavor** i.e. **Domestication of Foreign Names and Titles**, so that the outcome of translational action fits to the target audience, its culture, customs and circumstances. The images provided below indicate how domestication of foreign names and titles is done in translation under Skopos theory:

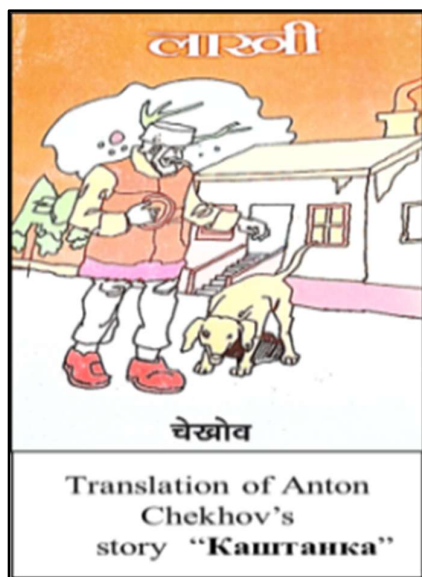


Image -1



Image - 2

Image - 1 is a cover page of a book published by **Pratham Prakashan Grah** in 2009. The book contains translation of **Anton Chekhov's story "Каштанка"**. The publisher has also mentioned on title page that the **story is for children (रुसी बाल कथा)**. Observing that the title of the story, which is also the name of the main character: The dog in the story does not tell Indian readers anything. In fact, it might confuse the intended readers i.e. Indian children, hence keeping in mind the purpose and target readers the translator decided not to use conventional translation techniques. Rather, he opted to domesticate the title of the story and the name of the main character "**Каштанка**" as "**लाखी**" in Hindi.

Likewise, **Image -2** is a screen-shot of an advertisement of the **Russian Truck "Kamaz"** on **YouTube**. Kamaz is a Russian automobile manufacture of trucks. **Pakistan's Ghandhara Industries Limited** is the authorized assembler and manufacture of Russian Kamaz trucks in Pakistan. To give a regional

¹Image of cover page of the book लाखी: रुसी बाल कथा (एंटोन चेखोव)

²Screenshot of a YouTube video available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKQD8wB2_Bg (Accessed 28 September 2022)

touch and domesticate the Russian Brand-Name, also to tempt Pakistani customers to buy these trucks despite the fact that Pakistanis have had **anti-Soviet** and **anti-Russian sentiments**, chiefly since the **Cold War Era** and the **Afghan War**, the video developer-translator deliberately projects Kamaz as Ghandhara Industries Limited's own product so that the customers could easily relate to it and feel it as an indigenous Pakistani Truck (**refer to the video on the link provided in the footnote on the previous page**).

Based on these examples of translations, one can understand that sometimes a translator needs to change his **translation strategies, methods & techniques** and even the **whole process of translation** to meet client's requirements going by approach of Skopos theory. In such cases, a translator not just translates, the way he has to, but the way the client desires according to his need.

Since, under Skopos theory, a translator strives for achieving the purpose indicated by the translation brief therefore, a translator's approach could be **faithful, fidelitous, free, literal, accurate, approximate etc** (Zeynalzadeh, 2018). Hence, the intended outcome depends upon which of these approaches or moves is more target oriented and serves the given purpose more effectively and efficiently.

Thus, the main objective of a translator applying Skopos's approach to his translation is not bringing two texts closer but to offer source information in the best possible way that seems suitable for the target reader and his circumstances.

Generally, the opponents of Skopos theory, disprove its usefulness and practicality in translation that it gives a free hand to a translator in executing a translation task.

The critics of Skopos theory, also blame that the theory could be suitable only for **translation of non-literary texts**. And it cannot be applicable to **translation of literary and religious texts**.

Since the whole Skopos theory of translation is based on the principle of maintaining and ensuring whether TT serves the purpose of translation or not, thus based on this principle and our analysis and observation, we can say that Skopos's translation approach, could be applicable to literary texts but only to a certain extent. Translation of literary texts under the theory would not serve the intended purpose entirely as literary works are usually read by a large number or a wide variety of people.

In addition to that, since textual traits of literary texts are unique by itself, hence, their translation is always a challenge as compared to translation of non-literary texts. As literary texts have **aesthetic, expressive, cultural, national, polysemic, figurative elements, peculiar style and effect**. Therefore, all these elements complicate task of a translator. As Skopos theory focuses primarily on the intended purpose of translation, target audience's need and its cultural and social circumstances, thus most of the above-mentioned elements could more likely be ignored as a result of which quality of translation would also be compromised. Thus, it is always difficult to achieve adequacy in translation of literary texts under Skopos theory.

Whereas, unlike literary texts, non-literary texts are generally intended and translated for a certain type of readers and particularly for small groups of people with the same *interests* and *objectives*. Therefore, Skopos theory is much suitable and applicable to translation of non-literary texts as these texts are usually understood at an equal level with the same intent.

However, we cannot entirely play down efficacy and applicability of Skopos theory to literary translation. Skopos theory's approach could fit literary translation when translation is considered and sold as a product, but not a means of assimilating greatness and richness of a foreign literature.

Similarly, we could also see a number of different versions of **translations of the same sacred text** that are available in the market for different groups of readers. Since these translations and interpretations are done with some specific purpose, i.e. in reaching and addressing a large number of readers because of this, sometimes God's Words are interpreted and translated according to taste of people keeping in view of the volume of circulation and profit margin. Subsequently, at times meaning of God's words is misinterpreted or compromised in accuracy.

Since Skopos theory gives a bit freedom to the translator, that could be a blessing for translation of non-literary texts but not for sacred texts. Therefore, the theory is less effective in translation of religious texts too. Scriptures should not be paraphrased, nor interpreted or translated in one's own style otherwise its essence and treasure, could be lost entirely.

Thus, as far as practicality and utility of Skopos theory in literary translation and translation of religious texts is concerned, the theory could be applicable and also be worthwhile, only when translation task is performed with some business or commercial objective. Whereas, since non-literary texts are generally translated with definite commercial purpose, hence, Skopos theory is more appropriate and

suitable for translation of non-literary texts.

Despite the afore-mentioned limitations of Skopos theory, the theory prompts translation experts, researchers and theoreticians to rethink and redefine the role of a translator, his accountability, obligations, responsibilities and at the same time his rights too.

There are many instances, when translation is not possible, in those cases Skopos theory could provide solution as it backs the idea of **Extra-translation Role of a translator** (экстра-переводческая сверхзадача).

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