



Tracing the Evolution: A Historical Analysis of Translation Studies from Ancient Times to the Present

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Abstract

Translation studies have played an important role in mediating the transfer of messages among societies. This research carefully investigates the nature of the historical development of translation from its previous beginnings to the present, with the aim of joining the traditional practices with the modern theoretical methods. It uses a historical-analytical and comparative framework to check a range of sources, from ancient manuscripts to contemporary scholarship, in order to trace key methods and transformations in translation practices. The findings show that translation has undergone huge changes shaped by cultural, political, and technological developments. These include a gradual movement from literal translation toward more interpretative approaches, the standardizing influence of the printing press, and the recognition of translation as an academic discipline in the twentieth century. The research suggests that translation extends beyond linguistic transfer to encompass broad cultural and intellectual dimensions, pinpointing the importance of multi-disciplinary perspectives and historical awareness in contemporary research. The study reaffirms the central role of translation in cultural and intellectual development and points to the growing importance of exploring the interaction between human translators and machine translation systems in future research.

Keywords

Evolution; historical analysis; translation studies

1. Introduction

The current research explores the historical development of translation studies from ancient to the present. It elaborates the magnificent role of translation studies in literary, religious, and diplomatic exchanges across various cultures. It draws attention to significant developments between the Medieval period and the Renaissance and Reformation, particularly the influence of humanism and growing cultural exchanges on translation practices. It also determines how philosophical thought gave way to the gradual appearance of translation as a modern, active, and important academic discipline.

It further investigates the transformative effect of globalization-related and digital technologies, depicting how translation studies have repeatedly adapted to shifting cultural, political, and technological scenarios. The introduction highlights the key theoretical shifts in the field, moving from the linguistic turn of the twentieth century to modern postcolonial perspectives, and identifies the roles of great scholars such as Eugene Nida, Lawrence Venuti, and Mona Baker.

Based on old texts and highly academic literature, the current research gives a broad overview of the discipline of

translation studies as a whole and focuses its importance in providing cross-cultural communication. It also engages with the George Steiner's great classification of translation studies and re-defines its goals as an innovation of the origins, development, and influential figures who have fashioned translation works across various historical periods.

2. Investigating the Beginnings of Translation: Understanding from the Medieval and Renaissance Periods

Translation works in ancient civilizations performed a magnificent role in communication, cultural exchanges, and the transfer of information and messages across linguistic boundaries in different empires. In Mesopotamia, record keepers were greatly busy in translating contents between Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian languages to safeguard laws, religious writings, and administrative files. Many of these translation works, conserved on clay tablets, also gave huge evidence of old systems of governments and record-keeping. Similarly, in ancient Egypt, scribes performed their duties with different writing systems and styles, including hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic scripts, to safeguard religious, administrative, and literary goals. A huge breakthrough in understanding ancient Egyptian writing came with the invention of the Rosetta Stone, which consists of dual inscriptions in hieroglyphic, Greek, and demotic. This relic proved significant in the unraveling of hieroglyphic script and, importantly, advanced modern understanding of ancient Egyptian culture and language (Gerald, 2001). Figure 1 shows a pie chart depicting the ancient geographical origins of translation practices in different civilizations. It shows the relative role of Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Ancient China, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, and Ancient India in fashioning old translation activities. Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece are often considered to be greatly influential due to their massive engagement with multilingual content and the translation of literary, legal, and philosophical texts. Ancient civilizations such as India, Egypt, China, and Rome also played less documented roles in the development of translation studies. Each played in different ways, created by their cultural, religious, and administrative needs. A historical explanation of translation activities suggests different degrees of contribution across regions, showing differences in contextual traditions, record keeping, and intellectual exchange rather than fixed quantitative percentages.

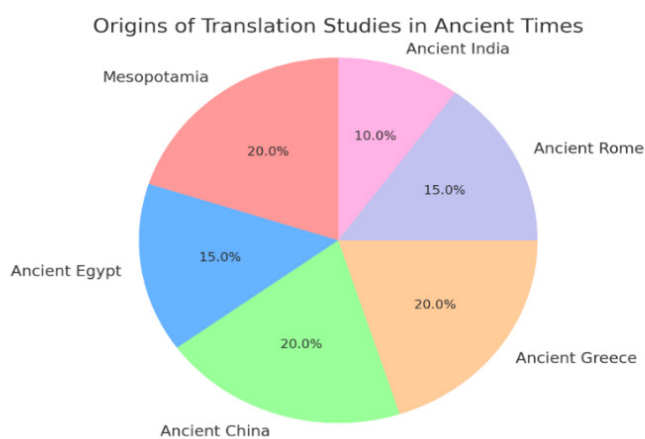


Figure 1. The Origin of Translation studies in ancient times.

Source: <https://atlasls.com/the-history-of-translation/>

Greek civilization was hugely engaged in translation studies throughout the Hellenistic period. As the power of Alexander the Great broadened, Greek became a dominant lingua franca across the Mediterranean and parts of the Near East, giving birth to the movement of texts across cultural and linguistic boundaries at that time. This period experienced the translation of various notable works from different civilizations into Greek, showing both intellectual inquisitiveness and the practical needs and wants of a multilingual civilization. One of the most important translation works of this time period was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It was created in Alexandria, it served the religious needs of Greek-speaking Jew communities and also stood as an early and effective example of huge translation work, showing the wider cultural exchanges and characteristics of the Hellenistic world (McClellan, 1992). The Septuagint, engaged under Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the 3rd century BCE, became the early Greek phase of the Hebrew Bible for Greek-speaking Jews and later on early Christians. It played an important role in transferring

Jewish religious thoughts and also had a lasting influence on old Christian theology. During the prestigious Hellenistic period, Greek scholars translated a broad range of scientific, philosophical, and literary works from civilizations such as Babylon, Egypt, India, and Persia. This transmission of texts helped conserve older intellectual traditions while also deepening and expanding Greek thought through sustained cross-cultural exchange (Joseph, 2019). Table 1 shows a comparative survey of the extent to which literature from different older languages has been translated into other notable languages. It describes the cultural, religious, and historical significance of these traditions and shows how broadly their contents have been transmitted across various civilizations.

Table 1. Comparing different ancient languages and the extent to which their literature has been translated into other languages

Languages	Notable Works	Relative Scale	Notes on Translation
Greek	Works by Homer, Plato, Aristotle	9	Widely translated due to their foundational influence on Western philosophy, science, and literature.
Latin	by Virgil, Cicero, Ovid	8	Extensive translations in law, science, philosophy, and literature.
Sanskrit	Vedas, Mahabharata, Ramayana	7	Important in religious texts (Hinduism, Buddhism) and classical literature.
Chinese	Confucius, Tao Te Ching	6	Significant in philosophy, poetry, and historical records.
Arabic	Quran, works of Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina	5	Key in religious texts (Islam) and medieval science and philosophy.
Hebrew	Hebrew Bible	4	Central to Jewish religious texts, translated extensively into many languages.
Egyptian	Pyramid Texts	3	Translations focus on religious and funerary texts.
Sumerian	Epic of Gilgamesh	2	Limited but significant translations of early literature and mythology.
Norse	Poetic Edda	1	Translations focus on mythology and sagas.

Sources: A Companion to Translation Studies, edited by Piotr Kuhiwczak and Karin Littau.

Translators supported ancient civilizations in transferring knowledge and culture. Translators were a crucial mediator in states with limited literacy rates, creating significant publications accessible to more readers. Old translators used their linguistic and cultural abilities to interpret religious, legal, scientific, and literary content into common languages, making them able to achieve their broad circulation. Scribes translated Sumerian governmental, religious, and literary texts into Akkadian, the local language, in old Mesopotamia. These works were preserved for future generations. (Oppenheim, 1967). During the Middle Ages, translation mostly stressed record keeping and extending religious knowledge, especially through literal translations of Latin church texts, such as St. Jerome's Vulgate Bible. In contrast, the Renaissance period focused on the rebirth of classical learning and humanism, with translators like Desiderius Erasmus initiating more flexible and readable translation methods. The innovation of the printing press also played a key role in spreading intellectual and cultural exchanges across the European continent during the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Humanism and the Reformation had a pivotal impact on the analytical and cultural environment of early Europe throughout the Renaissance and the Reformation. Humanists stressed the examination and translation of classical works, namely those written by Greeks and Roman writers, which were saved and passed down by academicians throughout the Middle Ages. Petrarch, Erasmus, and Pico della Mirandola, among other humanists, tried to reshape enthusiasm for old literature, philosophy, and rhetoric by translating and giving explanations.

3. Systematic approaches of the Modern Era and Evolution practices in Translation

Translation studies saw huge growth in the 20th century. Different experts from different fields made valuable contributions to the advancement of translation theory. Well-known linguists like Eugene Nida and Roman Jakobson presented notable translation theories grounded in linguistic principles. Jackson's theory of translation equivalence, which stresses the magnificence of language structures and interactive roles in translation. They pioneered the basis for modern-day descriptive methods of translation analysis. On the other hand, Nida invented the notion of dynamic equivalence, which gives priority for the transmission of the text and impact of the source text in the target language, rather than precisely adhering to its grammatical composition (Kirsten, 2005).

Table 2. gives an overview of how structured ways and evolutionary procedures have formed modern translation efforts, stressing both theoretical composition and practical applications driven by tech advancements and universal communication needs.

Table 2. Systematic frameworks and evolutionary practices in translation during the Modern Era

Aspect	Description
Systematic Approaches	Descriptive, prescriptive, and functional theories (e.g., equivalence, Skopos theory)
1. Translation Theories	Use of soft-wares to advance in translation (e.g., SDL Trados, MemoQ, CAT tools for terminology)
2. Cat Tools	Analyzing huge bodies of text transmit translation decisions
3. Corpus linguistics	Methods for ensuring accuracy and good consistency (e.g., proofreading, editing, QA processes)
4. Quality Assurance	Adapting of translations culturally, contextually for specific locales
5. Localization	Advanced demand for multilingual content due to international business and communication needs
Evolutionary Practices	
1. Globalization Impact	enhanced demand for multilingual content due to worldwide business and communication needs and wants
2. Technological Advancements	Artificial Intelligence and machine translation advancements (e.g., neural MT, NLP)
3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration	Collaboration with linguists, subject matter experts, and technologists for specialized fields
4. Ethical Considerations	Addressing issues such as fidelity to the source text, cultural sensitivity, and bias reduction
5. Hybrid Approaches	Combining human expertise with machine capabilities for optimal results

Source: Multiple sources

The linguistic turn means a change in the pattern of thinking where people started considering the importance of language while understanding the world. Structuralism studies the hidden systems and rules that underlie different aspects of culture and language. In the 20th-century social sciences and philosophy, the linguistic turn became an important development. It became a game-changer where the attention of the people shifted from traditional studies of knowledge and reality to language (Jayne, 2002). The linguistic shift, originated by philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein and Ferdinand de Saussure, expressed the fundamental role of language in affecting cognition, perception, and the creation of social reality. Saussure's structuralist approach to language, as highlighted in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), initiated the foundation for the structuralist movement, which had a magnificent influence on intellectual debates across disciplines such as literary theory, anthropology, and semiotics. Structuralism revealed the fundamental ways and processes that organize human language and culture (Jayne, 2002).

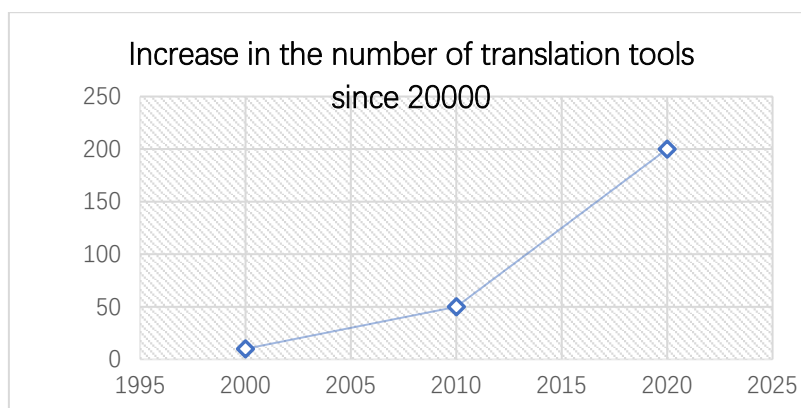


Figure 2. A sudden increase in the number of Translation tools since 2000.

Source: TechRadar Machine Translation.com

Postcolonial methods in translation studies emerged as a reaction to the linguistic and cultural influence left behind by colonialism. Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha enquired into the Western-centered perspectives about translation and focussed the importance of language and translation insustaining colonial state structures and isolating indigenous cultures (Tarek, 2009). They promoted translation approaches that were attentive to matters of representation, identity, and agency, and that question dominant narratives of culture (David, 2009). Human translation and Machine translation are two different methods in the way they handle the text and translate language. Machine translation is the product of artificial intelligence and computer software to translate texts in a highly swift manner, which is highly efficient. Machines usually fail to fully comprehend cultural meanings, emotions, idioms, and the original context of a content. Human translators can better address cultural background behind the words, the feelings, tone, and which makes their translations more natural and real in nature, meaningful and accurate. Machine translation is considered as cheaper and faster but still many people believe in human translation because of the human feelings and way of expressing of emotions (Pujadas, n.d.).

4. Conclusion

The investigation reveals that the dynamic evolution of translation studies in a globalized world and technologically progressive context, distinguished by the arising need for precise translation and localization. It highlights that translators must adapt to rapid technological breakthroughs while continually addressing ethical, cultural, and socio-political obligations. Translation goes beyond mere language activity; it serves as a crucial instrument for promoting cross-cultural communication, global collaboration, social equity, and human rights. The study stresses the magnificence of historical analysis in understanding the evolution of translation methodologies from ancient to the present, explaining the intellectual and cultural effects that have shaped this important discipline. It deeply explains the prospective research dimensions that investigate the influence of machine intelligence and machine learning on translation. It is also advocating for cross-disciplinary investigations into their inferences for quality, ethics, and the altering function of translators in a digital landscape.

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