

UBALDO STECCONI

“Five Reasons Why Semiotics Is Good for Translation Studies”

Keywords:

equivalence, semiotics, transfer, translation

1. Author information

Ubaldo Stecconi has taught translation theory and practice in Italy, the Philippines and the United States for 14 years. He has worked for the European Commission in Brussels as a translator and speechwriter since 2001. His publications include three translated books and about 30 papers in international journals. He was a member of the Executive Board of the European Society for Translation Studies. In the European Commission he was seconded to the Cabinet of President Prodi as a speechwriter. He was responsible for the overall organisation of the Theory Meets Practice seminar series.

Stecconi’s contribution to translation studies is recognised for dealing with semiotics in translation. He has published his articles in esteemed publishing houses: St. Jerome and John Benjamins.

2. Abstract

The text was written in order to prove that semiotics is relevant to translation studies. The author provides five reasons for this. Stecconi claims that translation is a special form of signification or semiosis, which means that all translating is semiosis, but not all semiosis is translating.

The article is divided into several parts. At the beginning the author explains his objectives; then he develops his ideas in the following parts: 1. Introduction, 2. The strange case of

translation semiotics, 3. Saying, 4. Thing, 5. The same, 6. Almost; finally, Stecconi provides notes and references.

The author starts with Peirce’s theory of signs, and analyses the title of Eco’s famous book on translation *Dire quasi la stessa cosa (Saying Almost the Same Thing)*. Then he shows how semiotics is important for translation. Stecconi claims that translation is a special form of semiotics; semiotics can be used to investigate the logico-semiotic conditions of translation in general. Based on Peirce’s existential categories, the author divides translation into three entities: “events, logico-semiotic conditions and norms” (Stecconi 2004: 23). By doing this, he introduces the concept of the foundation of translation and its logico-semiotic conditions: difference, similarity and mediation. Semiotics brings them together, and this is the cardinal reason why semiotics is important for translation studies.

3. Terminology used in the article

Prerequisite terms – semiosis, semiotics, localisation

Key terms:

Source text term	Meaning	Term in Polish
intersemiotic translation	an interpretation of the verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal systems	przekład intersemiotyczny
localisation	cultural adaptation and translation of software, video games and websites	lokalizacja
semiosis	an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of <i>three</i> subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs	semioza
semiotics	the analytical study of the essential conditions to which all signs are subject	semiotyka

text	here the term refers to an organised set of signs – no matter whether verbal or nonverbal	tekst
verbal language	inter-personal communication using words, both spoken and in writing	język werbalny

4. Methodology

The author admits that his article is based on the theoretical and methodological framework of Charles S. Peirce's theory of signs. He also uses Umberto Eco's text and mentions Roman Jakobson's "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", Aloysius ver Kersteren's "Literature and Translation" and Gideon Toury's "Translation" entry in Thomas Sebeok's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*. Basing on these texts, he develops his own inferences.

5. Links with other publications on the subject

Cosculluela, C. 2003. "Semiotics and Translation Studies: An Emerging Interdisciplinarity". *Semiotica*: 1–4/2003. 105–137.

Eco, U. 1986. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Gorlée, D. L. 1994. *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation: with Special Reference to the Semiotics by Charles S. Peirce*. Amsterdam. Atlanta: GA Rodopi.

Ludskanov, A. 1975. "A Semiotic Approach to the Theory of Translation". *Language Sciences*: 35/1975. 5–8.

Petrilli, S. 1990. "On the Semiotics of Interpretation: Introduction", in: Gérard Deledalle, *Charles S. Peirce, 1839–1914. An intellectual biography*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Ponzo, A. 1993. *Semiosis, Referent and Sign Production in a Theory of Semiotics*. Amsterdam. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

6. Critical commentary

Stecconi poses the fundamental question: What do we mean by translation? Then he tries to convince the reader that the semiotic model of translation is the most accurate in this domain. His argumentation seems to be simple and logical. He analyses the problem throughout the whole article, constantly referring to Eco's title *Saying Almost the Same Thing*. Every word from this title becomes a separate subtitle in Stecconi's article. He analyses the words and provides the reader with further references (other authors and conceptions).

The outcome of the research conducted is absolutely positive for me. I have familiarized myself with different theories in translation studies and found a lot of information about other books, authors and approaches. My skill of data mining improved, as well.

7. Quotation to remember the text by

"(...) all translating is semiosis but not all semiosis is translating" (Stecconi 2004: 15).

"Semiotics helps us break free of precisely metaphorical bounds. Translating does not involve transferring words, meaning or what have you like a parcel in the mail. When one translates nothing is transferred, nothing moves. Like all signs, translations happen" (Stecconi 2004: 21).

8. References

Stecconi, U. 2004. "Five Reasons why Semiotics is Good for Translation Studies", in: Yves Gambier, Miriam Shlesinger, Radegundis Stolze (eds.), *Doubts and Directions in Translation*

Studies: Selected Contributions from the EST Congress, Lisbon 2004.
Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 15–26.

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