

PETER NEWMARK: FIRST A TEACHER

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During the last two decades, developments in translation studies have increased not only in quantity but also in quality. To a large extent, Professor P. Newmark of Polytechnic of Central London has contributed to a better understanding of the real nature of translation.

His first theories on the subject appeared in 1957 in the *Journal of Education* and in 1967 he launched the first full-time postgraduate course in technical and specialized translation at what was then the Holborn College of Law.

His theories have been largely based on his experiences as a teacher. He has published several papers on medical translation, the translation of plays, the history of translation, communicative and semantic translation (a distinction which has become fundamental in his theories), language functions, synonymy and metaphor, etc.

It is not always easy to meet the people one reads or studies, but we had the opportunity to talk with him in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, last January 31st, where the "I Simposio Internacional de Traductores e Intérpretes" took place. There we could also verify what he once wrote: "I am something of a compulsive writer, but I am first a teacher"

We all know that you are working now in the University of Surrey. How long have you been working on translation?

That is a difficult question because I started specializing in translation gradually. I used to be a language teacher, I taught French, German, Italian. I taught translation classes. I probably began specializing in translation, in say, 1963

approximately, I got interested in it because I am a compulsive writer. I started writing about it and, as I said, gradually specializing began.

Have you always worked in Britain?

Yes.

Which languages do you work with?

French, German and Italian.

Do you speak Spanish?

No. I read Spanish fairly well and I keep starting to learn it but don't know Spain well at all. I've only been in Madrid once perhaps fifteen years ago.

We already know about your theories through your books, your articles and so on. But apart from being a theorist, have you ever translated any specific work?

Yes.

What kind of works?

I translated three art books quite a long time ago. I have done various jobs for translation agencies. I've translated a short story in a Penguin Anthology, and recently I did a long speech by an industrialist who is the head of a large international company.

Does translation really exist or is it a creation of a new text?

The fact that a translation is never perfect does not mean that it does not exist. It does exist, that's the first point. It's in a sense the translation of a new text, but translation needs to consider all kind of other things, too. It's also to some extent an imitation, and it's an interpretation as well.

If there is no perfect translation, how can you mark your students's exams?

It's precisely because there is no perfect translation that I can mark them to any extent. When something is wrong, it is wrong, and so that's a mistake. Then, there are other elements, the differences of a level of usage, what I call in my class N. S. U. (Normal Social Usage). If that is appropriate you have alternatives, but I can't go beyond the alternatives, so that would be a mistake. So if I am talking about marking, marking is mainly negative, I would say. But you have to be careful. It's also positive, there is a creative element in translation that has also to be acknowledged in the making of an exam.

What is translation for you, an art, a science or a craft?

I will say translation is partly art, partly science, partly craft, partly a matter of taste, and it would depend on the particular text as to which of the four aspects is stronger. But I think that in a normal translation you have the four elements.

So you first analyze the text and then you decide if the translation will be a craft, an art or a science.

I think it is necessary to categorize in order to explain things. I don't compartmentalize, which is what you are trying to tempt me to do, partly because everything has fuzzy edges; you just can't put things in boxes, strictly speaking.

That is much more dangerous to say because I can't divide things like that. In general, I would say yes.

If I am translating a work of art, then I hope my translation would also be some kind of work of art. But if I am translating an economics or medical text, I would say that I try to write well, that is as far as art goes. Certainly the science, even the truth, the verification is important in both kind of texts. I think that there is always a scientific element.

And, for example, in poetry, do you consider that the translator is making art?

Yes, because any translation of a poem should be another independent poem, so it should be a work of art.

Do you think that poetry can be translated in general?

Yes.

How should it be rendered, in poetry or in verse?

Both have served their purposes and both are useful. In prose it is an introduction to the poem. It's a way forward towards understanding the original, if the reader has already got some knowledge of the foreign language, and also it might be an introduction to a more comprehensive verse translation. But if I have some knowledge of the foreign language, I would prefer often to read them both, always knowing that if the translation is good it would be the comprehensive one. In other words, it would be the one that is in poetry, if the original is in poetry. That is rare.

I do not know very much about Spanish literature but I have read translations by Roy Campbell. I think they are very, very good. They are in poetry and Roy Campbell was a poet.

Metaphors are very important for you. You even said that they are touchstones of translation. Could you explain it to us?

The word *metaphor* comes from Greek and it means "translation". *Meta*-is *trans*-and *phor* is the Greek *for-lation* which is a Latin word that means "carry". You carry something across and that is what metaphor does. It carries something across concisely and gets to the main point of a visual image and its connection with meaning, but in that sense is translated to another language. So you have "a cloudy look" or I do, which means "I am worrying, that is really translating literal language but it gives it something more. It is in this sense that I regard metaphor as a central element in translation.

You have even changed Richards' terminology about the parts of metaphor.

Don't say even as if I were naughty. Richards is a great writer, a very fine writer. Why did I change it? Is that your question? I think my words are more transparent and I want to make words, when I use terms, to be easily understood on the whole. That is why I do not use the word *tenor* or *vehicle*, I prefer to use the words *sense* and *image*.

Before reading your book we had never considered that a euphemism was a metaphor. Could you explain to us why do you consider it so?

Yes, if you say "kick the bucket", a rather old-fashioned expression which means "to die", then, that is a metaphor. I have already explained it. It is concealing something that is unpleasant with not such an unpleasant image.

You have established a difference between semantic and communicative translation, as does Nida between formal and dynamic. Is there any equivalence between both theories?

I want to say I am continually developing my ideas about translation and thinking about it. When I said "the more important the language of a text, the more closely it should be translated", and its corollary "the better written a text, the more closely it should be translated", I base that on communicative semantic translation.

I would say that semantic translation somewhat resembles Nida's formal equivalence, but it isn't exactly the same because Nida's formal equivalence clings to the source language text in a way semantic translation doesn't. Nida generally condemns formal equivalence in his terms, and I do too, but I use semantic translation for translating authoritative texts, which include literature in general terms. So, in that sense, that is the difference between semantic translation and formal equivalence.

I would say if you... can get dynamic equivalence so much the better in any type of text, but for instance, if you are translating a cultural text or a text, say about Spanish food, then, your communicative translation would deal with it, but it would not be possible to get dynamic equivalence because the non-Spanish reader would not have the same reaction to "paella" or any of your food as a Spanish reader. Or probably not, because there is a world of cultural tradition behind it here, and in England there wouldn't be. Then the discussion, say of local government in Spain, could not have the same kind of dynamics for a non-Spanish readership.

What about other theorists? Which ones do you prefer or do you try to follow?

I go my own way. There are some people who write about translation who are fairly close to me, in general terms, while others are pretty distant, for example, Neubert. I myself prefer to talk about principles. Writers who do not respect the authority of the source language text, and that applies to many of them, I would disagree with. Translation is concerned with the moral and the factual truth, and to me a translation has a liberating effect. Some methodist writers I do not agree with, perhaps because I am a political animal and they are not.

Do you think that translation is more important than interpretation?

That depends. There's more translation that is required than interpretation, but there is no job that is as important as that of an interpreter in many international conferences. What happens when say, statesmen can't understand each other. In many scientific conferences the role of the interpreter is vital and he has no time like the translator. He can make more appalling mistakes in a measured time, which

makes an awful difference to the whole question. So I can't make this kind of comparison between translation and interpretation.

I want to ask you something about the status of translators and interpreters in England, because as you know here in Spain they are not really well considered, because what is important is the writer or the poet.

We will take this separately. First the translators, who are much the larger professional group of the two. It depends on what you are comparing it with. You have to use the word relatively because everything is relative when you are comparing things. The status of the translator has improved in the last five or ten years. There is a separate organization that represents translators in England that was only set up two years ago. They are not able to negotiate our salaries which are low in relation to other jobs in business. The translators have a low status, an undeservingly low status, very different from the status in the European Communities where the salaries are very high, which seems amazing to a normal English translator who might well be earning, say, at the most twelve thousand a year. So usually a business translator in this sense, a staff translator, is underrated but perhaps more valued now than ten years ago. Literary translators have an organization but they can't negotiate salaries. Everybody negotiates literary translations by contract. It's not a full time job, so each contract is negotiated with the publisher. And the translator is also underrated in the sense that his name is often at the back of the titled page in rather small print. Sometimes not there at all, and when the book is reviewed you are lucky if the reviewer says something about it being readable, if the translation is readable or not. Otherwise often the reviewer doesn't know the foreign language. So he wouldn't know how to criticize the translation.

Interpreters are not full time interpreters in England. It's all contractual work. But if you are British and you want to be an interpreter, you normally join the United Nations or some International Organization. Most people don't know anything about interpreters, but they generally enjoy recognized status and they are well paid even in Britain. In contractual work they are far better paid than translators because I think you can say that the people who use interpreters appreciate their importance since their talks depend on them, while the readers never see the translator; they are likely not to ever be aware of him/her.

In your opinion what is more important or interesting: to study a full degree in translation or to train people from different areas in the technique of translation?

It depends on what the person wants to do. If the person wants to be a translator, then, there are a few new degrees in translation that may be appropriate. However, all translators should do a post-graduate course in translation, a one year post-graduate course. Is it preferable to take a first degree in translation and then become a translator or take a first degree in a particular language, science or something like that, and then the post-graduate course? I think that the second is probably more desirable in Britain. But it depends on various circumstances.

Could you suggest to us any particular course on translation in England?
The Polytechnic of Central London, I think, has a very good post-graduate course.

Thank you very much for your time, Professor Newmark.

Thank you for your interest.