

XXIV. The Linguistic and non-Linguistic Requirements of Translation

Since the very time of Cicero, Horace, Dolet, and other translation practitioners and theorists in the western world and since the time of Al-Jahidh in the Arab world speaking in his book Al-Hayawan about the prerequisites of the successful translator, the linguistic requirements of translation have been forcefully emphasized. Very little or nothing is said, however, of the non-linguistic conditions which should be available in the translator.

First of all, a translator should be a person enjoying and having a great resource of power and energy. He must always be ready to answer the call for duty, issued from boss or from himself, day and night. Whether the duty takes full time or few minutes should be no issue at all to the translator.

Second, a translator should be having the patience of Job or something similar to it. Why? Because the work of the translator, particularly written translators, demands a lot of the translator choosing and re-choosing words, decoding, encoding and recoding messages and building sentences and paragraphs.

Third, the translator is supposed to be a good administrative manager who maximizes the efficiency of time and of the cognitive processes. S/he must know to allocate more time treating a metaphor in a literary text

while sparing less than that time when it appears in a scientific or a legal text, for instance.

Fourth, a translator must be bold and have the heart of a lion. S/he should be courageous enough to take decisions and stand by his or her decisions and defend them like the old great masters of translation who were criticized severely by the church. If translation is a process of decision making, I should like to add that translators must tolerate the attacks and criticisms and defend themselves very well.

Fifth, a translator is assumed to have an enormous capacity for love. His/her love starts with the book and author s/he translates, and involves the people he translate for. Professional translators can produce excellent translations by their neutrality, but with love their products excel more.

Sixth, a translator must be open-minded and never be narrow minded. The open-mindedness often makes it easier to retreat when committing a mistranslation. Narrow-minded and stubborn translators make reviewing and revising unnecessary steps.

Seventh, a translator is supposed to maintain physical fitness. S/he must have the capacity and power to work for long hours translating and retranslating texts. S/he must normally carry out breathing exercises, training neck at systematic intervals if s/he works on a computer, and stretching legs and back. S/he must also ensure working in a healthy and suitable environment.

Text by Kadhim Al-Ali

Reading Guidelines:

Readers should pay due attention to the structuring of the text(s) they read. The above text, for instance, is structured on the opposites of linguistic and non-linguistic. The author, then, decides to speak about the non-linguistic requirements of a translator.

Q.I Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: practitioners, forcefully, conditions, resource, duty, patience, decoding, encoding, recoding, administrative, cognitive, allocate, tolerate, excel, open-minded, stubborn, fitness, intervals, stretching.

Q.II Derive as many words as you can from the following words: practitioners, theorists, duty, demands, administrative, efficiency, tolerate, neutrality, stubborn, physical, healthy.

Q.III Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: forcefully, full-time, maximizes, bold, courageous, severely, enormous, retreat, physical, fitness, healthy.

Q.IV Answer the following questions briefly:

1. Why do you think that the linguistic requirements of translation received far more attention than the non-linguistic requirements?
2. Why should the translator be powerful and energetic all the time?
3. Do you think patience is a necessary requirement? Why?
4. Should the translator be a good administrative manager? Why?
5. What do you think happens when the translator is weak in character and personality?
6. Can love help in the work of the translator? How?
7. What happens when the translator is narrow-minded and stubborn?
8. Do you believe the translator should keep physically fit and healthy?

Q.V Reread any paragraph that sounds of utmost importance to you and translate it into plain Arabic.

Research Activity:

1. What are the views of Cicero, Horace, Dolet and Al-Jahidh about the linguistic requirements of translation?
2. Can you think of any non-linguistic requirement?

Quote of the Day:

A major difficulty in translation is that a word in one language seldom has a precise equivalent in another one

Arthur Schopenhauer