On Defining Translation

W h a t   i s   T r a n s l a t i o n ?

✚ Lexical definitions:

- The Cambridge Online Dictionary:

   Translation is something that has been changed from one language to another or the act of doing this.

- The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary:

   Translation is an act, process, or instance of translating: such as a rendering from one language into another *or* the product of such a rendering.

Based on these two definitions, translation can be defined as:

| **Process**	**Product**
It is a process for it needs a series of actions to take in order to move from the source language (SL) text to the target language (TL) text.	*It is a product as we are referring to the translated text (the outcome)*
Translat**ing**	Translat**ion**

▶ In addition to these two distinct meanings deduced from the two dictionary definitions, (**and supported by scholars such as Cratford (1995**), there is another meaning that could be attributed to the word translation, which is:

Translation the *Academic discipline* or as James S. Holmes (1988) describes it:

Translation Studies (The field): The second and the third weeks' theoretical parts will elaborate more on translation as a field and its historical development.

Translation

Process :	Product :	Translation Studies :
The act of translating	The translated text	The academic discipline
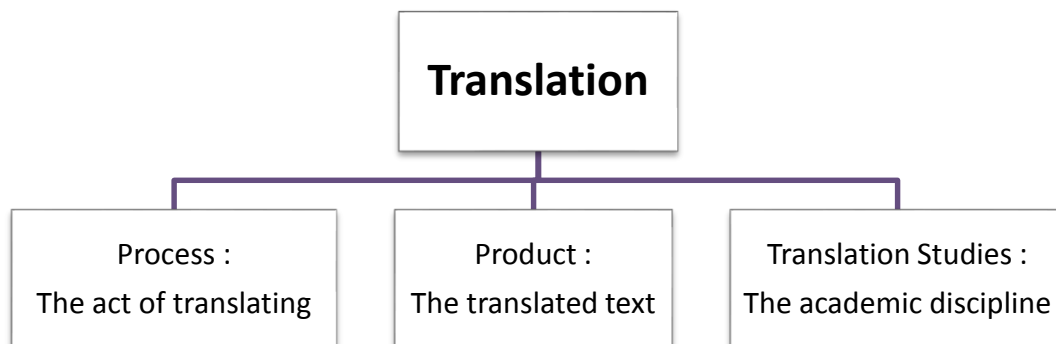
Scholarly Definitions:

▶ **According to Foster (1958)**, Translation is an act through which the content of a text is transferred from the source language in to the target language.

In this definition, we're talking about a written material (it's a text) that is transferred from the SL to the TL with the emphasis put on the content, which reminds us of an ongoing debate on whether the translation should respect the form, the content or both… This debate will be emphasized in details in the coming weeks when highlighting the different methods and theories adopted in translation…Some of these methods and theories are SL oriented whereas others are TL oriented.

▶ **Roman Jakobson (1959)** defines translation as follows: "Interlingual translation or 'translation proper': 'an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (**Jakobson discussed 'interlingual translation' in addition to two other categories, namely 'intralingual' and 'intersemiotic' translations**).

In Jakobson's definition, 'interlingual translation' is the translation that involves the classic combination of SL and TL. It is an act that necessitates the presence of two different languages as opposed to 'intralingual' and 'intersemiotic' translations.

The word 'interpretation', in this definition, suggests changing a verbal sign (written or oral) into another language. This change is based on a decision taken by the translator to determine what the intended meaning is. This decision is not easy indeed, and every single translator will offer a word in the discussion…That's why we cannot talk about one single translation or **THE** translation with a definite article; it's rather translations…

▶ **Nida and Taber** (1982), in The Theory and Practice of **Translation**, **define translation** as follows: "**Translating** consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of **meaning** and secondly in terms of style." (https://www.ccjk.com/translation-theories-eugene-nida-and-dynamicequivalence)

This is a very important definition as it casts light on one of the most significant approaches in the field of translation [Dynamic Equivalence (DE)]. It particularly marks a turning point in the methods adopted in translation, moving from a process that is based on word-for-word rendering (Formal Equivalence) to sense-for-sense translation where the focus is on the meaning, scarifying the form if needed. As an approach, DE seeks to reproduce in the TL an effect similar to that created in the SL, emphasizing first the content (meaning) and with a lesser degree the form (style).

▶ **According to Catford (1995)**, translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL) ".

Again, in this definition, translation has to do with a written act that involves replacing the text in the source language abbreviated as SL by another text in the target language abbreviated as TL. This definition focuses on the concept of translation in its written version, but we should bear in mind that the concept as a whole could be used to cover even the area known as interpreting or interpretation).

On Translation: the academic Discipline
A reading in James S. Holmes"
The name and The Nature of Translation Studies"

A discipline in this sense is any branch of knowledge that is typically studied in higher education. Emphasizing the term discipline, here, is meant to spot the point in time when translation has become a branch of study (a field of study) with its own potentially **controlled / standard / systematic** theories and practices.

To this end, Holmes' paper on **"The Name and Nature of Translation Studies"** is often cited by scholars/researchers as marking a turning point in the study of translation Since **1972** (the year when Holmes delivered a paper in the Translation Section of the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics, held in Copenhagen), translation has been granted a name as an academic discipline known as **Translation Studies.**

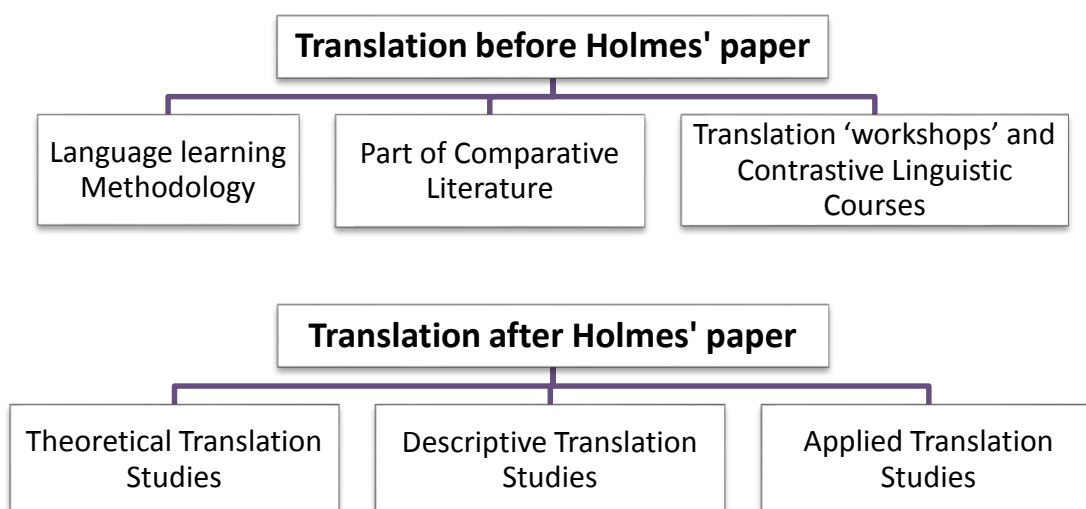▶ **Jeremy Munday (2001) states that:**
Translation studies is a relatively new academic research area that has expanded explosively in recent years. While translation was formerly studied as a language- learning methodology or as part of comparative literature, translation 'workshops' and contrastive linguistics courses, **the new discipline** owes much to the work of James S. Holmes, whose 'The name and nature of translation studies' proposed both a name and a structure for the field. The interrelated branches of theoretical, descriptive and applied translation studies have structured much recent research and have assisted in bridging the gulf that had grown between the theory and practice of translation. (P17).

▶ **And in 2016, Munday refines the definition by stating that:**
Translation studies is the now established academic discipline related to the study of the theory, practice and phenomena of translation.

Based on Munday's statements , it is very apparent that the field has undergone a huge transformation from being categorized as "relatively new" to 'the now established academic discipline' and this transformation could be traced even on a farther level when viewed from a Holmsian based perspective.

Historicizing Translation

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│       Translation before Holmes' paper   │
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   │                  │                  │
┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌─────────────────┐
│ Language │  │ Part of      │  │ Translation     │
│ learning │  │ Comparative  │  │ 'workshops' and │
│Methodology│ │ Literature   │  │ Contrastive     │
│          │  │              │  │ Linguistic      │
│          │  │              │  │ Courses         │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
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│ Translation  │  │ Translation  │  │ Translation  │
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On translation methods based on Peter Newmark's
A textbook of translation

After highlighting translation both as a concept and as a discipline, the focus is to be, from now on, on methods of translation. The object is to introduce some of the common methods usually adopted by translators in the process of rendering the content of a given text in a given source language into a given target language.

A method, in a general sense, is any particular way of doing something. And in our context, it is – let's say- a particular way followed by translators (in translation as a process "Translating") to practically accomplish what we call in translation the product (the translated text).

In this respect, Newmark, in his A Textbook of Translation (1988), argues that **the central problem of translating has always been whether to translate literally or freely**. These two approaches sum up, to a great extent, the general trends in the process of translating throughout history.

He added that **"many writers favored some kind of 'free' translation: the spirit, not the letter; the sense not the words; the message rather than the form; the matter not the manner".** This tendency has never been accepted as the norm since an ongoing debate on **"whether to translate literally or freely" is always active.**

Literally	Letter	Words	Form	Manner
Freely	Spirit	Sense	Message	Matter

Newmark's argument has practically contributed to the institutionalization of the approaches (methods) of translation by means of clearly defining two streams of emphasis in the translation process. He suggested "a flattened V diagram" which represents and clarifies methods of translation.
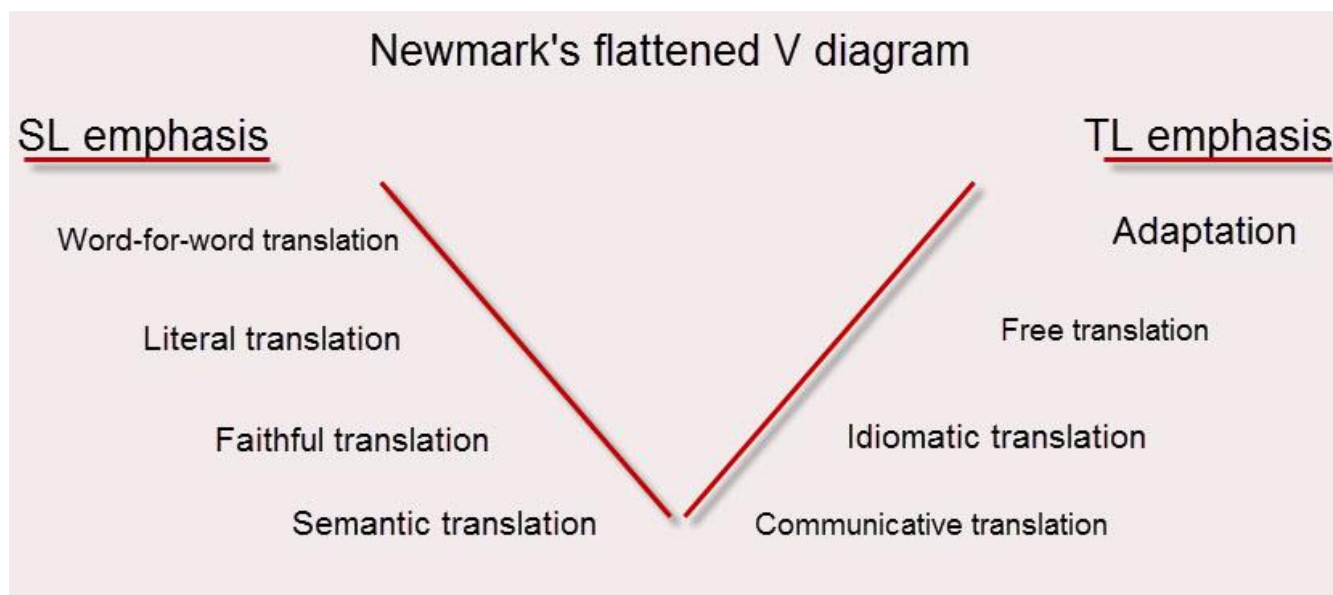
The kind of distance existing between the two lines of the V letter from top to bottom implies how the suggested translation methods differ from each other in terms of whether the translation is literal or free, SL oriented or TL oriented.

On Translation Methods Based on Peter Newmarks'
A Textbook of Translation
(Word-for-word / Literal Translation)

✚ **Word-for-word Translation :**

Word-for-word is usually confused with the second method (literal) suggested by Newmark. Though they might sound the same, they are not. Newmark defines word-for-word as follows:

Word-for-word "is often demonstrated as interlinear translation, with the TL immediately below the SL words. The SL word-order is preserved and the words translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context. Cultural words are translated literally. The main use of word-for-word translation is either to understand the mechanics of the source language or to construe a difficult text as a pre-translation process."

Though it is detailed, unfortunately this definition is usually squeezed to cover only the fact that the method has to do with replacing words from the SL by their equivalents in the TL. Yet, there are a number of other key words and expressions in the definition that need to be underlined for a better understanding of the method.

Interlinear	**Word-order**	**words translated singly out of context**
pretranslation process	**to understand the mechanics of the source language**	
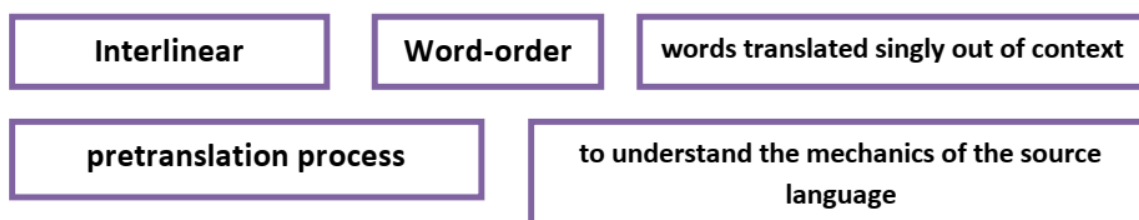
It is interlinear: (Every single word in the ST has′ its equivalent in the TT)*

Source text line: التنس	احمد	يلعب	
Target text line: tennis	Ahmed	plays	The word-order is preserved*

In the example above, the translation is done between two languages the word orders of which are different; Arabic with a commonly VSO order and English with an SVO order.

Interlinear Word-order words translated singly out of context pre-translation process to understand the mechanics of the source language.

The outcome is not grammatically acceptable though semantically speaking the meaning is there because the sentence is very simple. The case should be different if the translation is done between languages with the same word-order as it is the case, for instance, with English and French.

Word-for-word translation is a method that pays no attention to the context for "words are translated singly…out of context". This suggests that multiple meaning words or Homonyms, For instance, will not always be translated accurately.

I _**left**_ the phone on the _**left**_ side of the room.

Apparently, they look the same: same spelling but different meanings. Out of context, these two words might be translated in the same way and this should not be the case.

Importance of the context: The first "left" is a verb (the simple past of leave) but the second "left" is an adjective (the opposite of right).

Because word-for-word translation cannot be trusted in to produce translations which are lexically and semantically acceptable, it is suggested by Newmark that this method fits best if approached as a tool **"to understand the mechanics of the source language" or "as a pre-translation process".** He would add in another context that this method "is normally effective only for brief simple neutral sentences".

Literal Translation :

Literal translation is defined by Newmark as a method where: **"The SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context. As a pre-translation process, this indicates the problems to be solved."**

As explained before (in class 4), this method is usually confused with "word-for-word" method, especially that the two definitions provided for the two methods contain the following phrase "words translated singly". Hence, it's not surprising to hear individuals making use of the two methods to refer to the same thing.
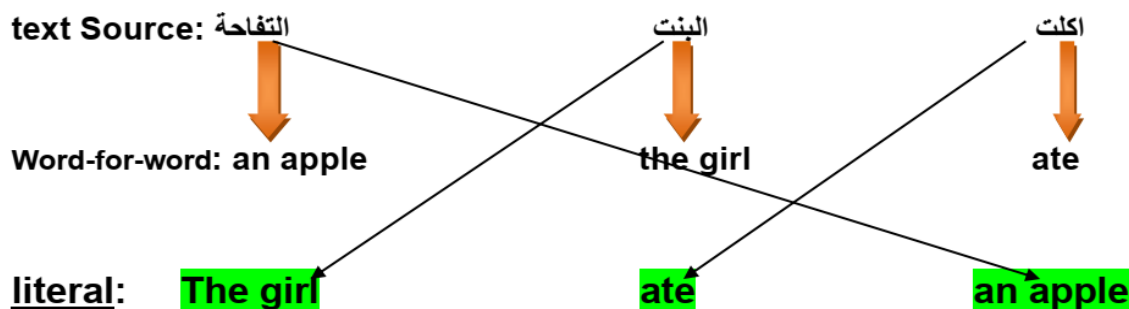
This definition addresses the issue of 'nearest equivalents' which is totally ignored in "word-for-word" as the process of translation is interlinear "with the TL immediately below the SL words".

This suggests certain flexibility that the translator should agree to when it comes to rendering a grammatical construction from the SL to the TL as languages are different in their syntactic string of words (VSO-SVO-SOV).

To exemplify, the word orders of English (SVO) and Arabic (VSO) are not the same and, hence, any act of translation that does not take into account these differences would end up translating word-for-word. Therefore, producing readable translations in the TL requires from translators to pay attention to these differences.

The process is certainly different if the act of translation is involving two languages with the same word order (French and English, for instance).

The following is an example of an act of translation that takes place from Arabic into English.

text Source: التفاحة   البنت   اكلت

Word-for-word: an apple   the girl   ate

literal: The girl   ate   an apple

Based on the above example, it seems that literal translation is capable of producing legible translations if compared with word-for-word which remains mechanical in a sense; nevertheless, it's not always possible for literal method of translation to offer a comprehensible final product, especially in the case of 'lexical words' which are again 'translated singly, out of context'.

Classifying the method as 'a pre translation process' suggests that Newmark himself does not regard literal translation as the ideal method to adopt if a translator wishes to produce a **final draft.** However, it is very much convenient for contexts where translators seek pointing out issues that should be fixed up before producing a well translated text in the TL.

Further, it should be noted that the classification used at the beginning to distinguish literal and free methods of translation locates this method in the first line of the "V" diagram down to the right, which suggests certain tendency towards prioritizing the SL in form and content.

On Translation Methods Based on Peter Newmarks'
A Textbook of Translation
(Faithful Translation)

After highlighting the two methods of 'word-for-word' and 'literal' translations, this week's class is on the third method listed by Newmark in his A Textbook of Translation (1988), called Faithful translation.

Its position in the first line down to the right implies its faithfulness to the source text as the four methods listed on this line are SL oriented as explained in the fourth week while the four other methods listed on the second line up to the right are TL oriented.

But is it faithful in form, in content or both?

Newmark defines Faithful Translation as follows:

A faithful translation attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures. It 'transfers' cultural words and preserves the degree of grammatical and lexical 'abnormality' (deviation from SL norms) in the translation. It attempts to be completely faithful to the intentions and the text-realization of the SL writer.

The first statement in the definition of faithful translation makes it clear that this method takes care of both the SL text and the TL text in its attempt to generate a text that is semantically SL oriented yet grammatically TL oriented. This means that the quality of being faithful to the source text is related mostly to its content.

	SL	LT
Content	**Source text content**	**Source text content**
Form	**SL form**	**TL form**

Based on the table, and in the light of 'faithful translation' method, the form of the source language text could be modified to fit 'the constraints' of the target language; nonetheless , the content is preserved and hence it is the same in both the SL and the TL.

In the last statement, Newmark further confirms the absolute nature of this method in its endeavor to remain loyal to the 'intentions and the text-realization of the SL writer'.

Every single writer has his/her own personal imprint that is governed by a number of variables, and any attempt to change or modify this imprint would eventually distort the final product (the translated text).

Faculty of Arts and Humanities   Initiation to Translation
Department of English Studies   Module 20
Semester 3   Prof. Jebbar

On Translation Methods Based on Peter Newmarks'
A Textbook of Translation
(Semantic vs. communicative)

Though positioned next to each other in the V diagram, each method belongs to a different line as semantic translation is SL oriented while communicative translation is TL oriented.

Before accounting for the rationale behind comparing the two methods, let's have an idea about how Newmark defines each one:

Semantic translation differs from 'faithful translation' only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value (that is, the beautiful and natural sound) of the SL text, compromising on 'meaning' where appropriate so that no assonance, word-play or repetition jars in the finished version [...]The distinction between 'faithful' and 'semantic' translation is that the first is uncompromising and dogmatic, while the second is more flexible, admits the creative exception to 100% fidelity and allows for the translator's intuitive empathy with the original.

Communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.

Because 'semantic translation' takes place right underneath 'faithful translation' in the V diagram, Newmark suggests that the two methods bear certain resemblance in their loyal interaction with/treatment of the SL text except for how the 'aesthetic' dimension is handled.

In other words, as heading towards TL oriented methods, 'semantic translation' becomes more interested in 'the beautiful and natural sound' of the act of translation to the extent of 'compromising on meaning' where and when needed.

This might sound weird given that the method is called 'semantic', that is associated with meaning; nonetheless, being semantically faithful should never overlook how the original meaning was artistically and beautifully articulated. Translators, hence, should engage in certain 'flexibility' to produce TL texts which aesthetically and semantically respect the original

On the other hand, communicative translation is a method that takes place in the second line of the V diagram up to the right.

The method, as its name denotes, is much interested in communicating the message of the SL text but more importantly in a 'readily acceptable and comprehensible' way as regards the reader of the TL text.

How the message was articulated in the SL text is not important in this regard; we are rather concerned with what was articulated, and it is the task of the translator afterward to render it in a semantically and linguistically readable form.

Newmark devotes a whole sub-section to further compare the two methods and comment on both areas of similarities and differences. In this respect, he commenced the comparison by emphasizing that 'only semantic and communicative translation fulfil the two main aims of translation, which are first, accuracy, and second, economy'.

'Accuracy' and 'economy' are incarnated in the fact that both methods are carefully handling matters of form, content and meaning, with 'semantic translation' heading towards the SL text and 'communicative translation' towards the TL text.

Further, the two methods are believed to be based on 'reject(ing) both the open choices and the random paraphrasing of free translation' (72), as form and content are genuinely respected either at level of the SL text in the case of 'semantic' or the TL text in the case of 'communicative'.

Newmark adds that 'a semantic translation is written at the author's linguistic level, a communicative at the readership's' (47).

This is quite natural for in 'semantic translation', which is SL oriented, the translator is very much interested in rendering the original message with little, or even no, concern of the TL reader; however, in 'communicative translation', the translator's first and foremost concern is to produce 'content and language [that] are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the [TL] readership.

For the type of texts that each method is preferably used for, "semantic translation is used for 'expressive' texts" whereas "communicative [translation is used] for 'informative' and 'vocative' texts". The underlying principle behind this arrangement is best described in Roda P. Robert's (1988) "Towards a Typology of Translations" in which she depicts the purpose of each text:

"The purpose of an informative text is to provide information to readers;, that of a vocative text is to persuade readers to act in a certain way; and that of an expressive text is to allow readers an insight into the thought and style of a given author."

Hence, the 'communicative' method is usually adopted when rendering texts, in which the reader is regarded as the focal point of the act of writing and addressed directly either through informing or persuading

The 'semantic' method, on the other hand and as emphasized in Newmark's definition, 'allows for the translator's intuitive empathy with the original'; that is the translator's concern is the source text and its author while the TL text's reader could be seen as an unreceptive subject awaiting for the aesthetically and linguistically crafted object which is the translated text.

This comparative account of Newmark's 'semantic' and 'communicative' methods of translation is not meant to stand as the last word in highlighting areas of similarities and differences between the different methods as Newmark himself acknowledges the impossibility of clear-cut distinctions when he states that "there are grey or fuzzy areas in this distinction, as in every aspect of translation".

The discipline is not a science in the mathematical or physical senses of the word, and the fact that it has been freshly institutionalized will constantly maintain a critical eye on its theories and practices, including the methods discussed by Newmark.

On Translation Methods Based on Peter Newmarks'
A Textbook of Translation
(Idiomatic – Free – Adaptation)

This week's class will cover the remaining translation methods discussed in Newmark's *A Textbook of Translation*, namely 'idiomatic translation', 'free translation' and 'adaptation' which are all TL oriented.

✦ Literal Translation :

To begin with, Newmark defines 'Idiomatic translation' as a method which "reproduces the 'message' of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original."

Positioned in the second line up to the right, 'idiomatic translation' is TL oriented by nature. This is supported by its tendency to linguistically straighten the translated text, but unfortunately at the expense of deforming the original content.

This deformation at the linguistic level is due to either (1) replacing the original expression by informal words or phrases - colloquial expressions – or (2) opting for certain idiomatic expressions that might sound *natural* and correct in accordance with the TL but *peculiar* to the SL.

'Idiomatic' translation, hence, is rationally to blame for 'distort[ing] nuances of meaning'; those tiny little semantic attributes as regards the SL text.

Nevertheless, the method is favored by translators and scholars (Seleskovitch and Stuart Gilbert) - as emphasized by Newmark – on the grounds that it helps in producing 'lively, natural translation(s)'.

✦ Free Translation :

Though called 'free translation', this method is not the freest of Newmark's. The method is defined as follows:

"Free translation reproduces the matter without the manner, or the content without the form of the original. Usually it is a paraphrase much longer than the original, a so-called 'intralingual translation', often prolix and pretentious, and not translation at all."

Simply put, this method is concerned with the message and nothing else. It is conventionally free in the sense that the act of translation is performed with one object in mind; rendering the message.

This is expertly described by Newmark as reproducing "the matter without the manner, or the content without the form of the original'. It is a real concretization of voices calling for the necessity to emphasize the content in any act of rendering.

The focus, in this regard, are not concerned with:

How was it articulated?
But
What was articulated?

The focus on 'what was articulated?' is not all positive as translators might abnormally produce translations that are 'much longer than the original'. Newmark aludes to Jackbson's 'Intralingual translation' (1959) which normally takes place within the same language, referring to acts of paraphrasing or rephrasing.

The act of paraphrasing is nothing but rewriting using different words and expressions which are meant to facilitate the understanding of the original text. For this reason, Newmark considers the method as 'not translation at all'

Adaptation :
Newmark defines adaptation as follows:

"This is the 'freest' form of translation. It is used mainly for plays (comedies) and poetry; the themes, characters, plots are usually preserved, the SL culture converted to the TL culture and the text rewritten. The deplorable practice of having a play or poem literally translated and then rewritten by an established dramatist or poet has produced many poor adaptations, but other adaptations have 'rescued' period plays."

Categorized as 'the freest' method, adaptation is essentially concerned with rendering literary texts such as 'plays' and 'poetry'.

The process, again, is TL oriented as the translator though maintains 'the themes, characters [and] plots', s/he adapts (converts) the SL culture to the context of the TL culture before rewriting the original text.

According to Newmark, the process of adaptation has not always been successful as the literal translation of some literary texts by translators and the act of rewriting them afterwards by 'established dramatist[s]' brought into being 'poor' versions as regards the original texts.

Yet, as there are always exceptions, there are some adaptations which happened as expected, fulfilling the literary requirements of the TL.

At the end of this discussion on translation methods, I chose one of Newmark's concluding statements in his *A Textbook of Translation*, when he discusses "Why can translating be so enjoyable and satisfying?"

He beautifully explained that translating can be so enjoyable "because it is never ending, [and] because you can always improve it […] the challenge, the wager … often you write on behalf of an author you do not know to readers you never meet, who may be educated all-rounders or ignorant.