
Nida, Eugene A. *Contexts in Translating*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001, 125 pp.

Contexts in Translating combines elements of contextual analysis with areas such as culture and language. Eugene Nida, author of *Towards a Science of Translating*, and *Componential Analysis of Meaning* explains how strict adherence to context creates a satisfactory translation. The book has a fragmentary, though concise, format, placing each topic in easily identifiable categories and subcategories. The chapters include: "What is Translating?" "Language and Culture," "Words in Context," "Relations Between Words," "Translating Texts," "Representative Treatment of Translating," and "Three Major Types of Translation Theories." The book also contains a complete glossary, bibliography, and index.

Of these seven chapters, chapters three and seven best define Nida's ideas. Chapter three, "Words in Context," focuses strongly on context in translation. It explains how words are used in diverse contexts, a reference to cul-

tural and geographical origins. Nida summarizes the ways in which words hold different meanings and levels of significance between distinct cultures and regions, emphasizing that a word's origin determines its exact definition.

Nida believes that words are strongly linked to their contexts and proposes that it is the responsibility of the translator to determine what is being addressed in order to produce a valid translation. The subsection in chapter three entitled, "Contexts involving Cultural Values," demonstrates how a word may take on a completely different definition or value from one region or culture to another. Therefore, the translator must realize these differences to create a meaningful translation. According to Nida, "Correct technical terminology serves to mark a statement as reliable and the writer as knowledgeable." This is evident in professional language as well as in street language and slang, all of which Nida incorporates in his study. This knowledge helps to protect the translator from insulting the culture or group being "decoded." Nida states that a translator shouldn't need a dictionary, for if he/she does, then it is evident that he/she is not a master of the other language and therefore is

not an efficient translator. Translating a work, first and foremost, believes Nida, respects cultural context and value.

In chapter three, Nida discusses how the setting and purpose of discourse define a word's capacity to assume different degrees of seriousness. How the word is presented determines the way it is perceived. For Nida, the contextual perception of a culture is essential to producing an adequate translation from that culture's perspectives.

Chapter seven, "Three Major Types of Translation Theories," is divided into three sections: "Theories Based on Philological Insights," "Theories Based on Linguistic Insights," and "Theories Based on Sociosemiotics." Philological insights are the primary basis for discussing translations theories and practice and are concerned with the study and evaluation of written texts, including all aspects from form to cultural influences. Cicero, Horace, Catullus, and Quintilian are noted for their theories of free translation vs. literal, which reflect written texts in different manners. He also mentions the analyses that have stemmed from these and other translators, including the theory of free translation defended by Matthew Arnold. This section then makes reference

to the philological insights of the 20th century, a time when language is looked upon as an integral part of culture as a kind of code. For a variety of reasons, many philologists have felt that the act of translating is impossible. Linguistic insights consider the differences between the source and target texts. Nida refers to Vinay and Darbelnet's consideration of French and English as a basis for translating. Nida presents Goodnough's work on Trukese semantic categories as an example of how cultural anthropology can provide insights into translation. The "communication theory", which describes the importance of interlingual communication also appears in this section. For an in-depth look at linguistic orientation in translating, Nida notes the research of Labov and Hymes. Theories based on sociosemiotics respect the rules of all systems of signs used by different societies. It is, in Nida's words, "the most pervasive and crucial contribution to an understanding of translation". The ideas of Plato and Aristotle are important antecedents to this line of thought. Nida gives a great deal of attention to associative and designative meanings because signs of all types must be recognized in relation to all other verbal signs within a text or associ-

ated expressions. Nida advises translators to seek the advice of Hofstadter's concept of isomorphs when problems arise in symbol translation. Nida finishes this section by stating that the most effective way to learn how to translate is through studying what expert translators have already accomplished.

Nida is concerned with *context* in regards to effective translating. His principle ideas in *Contexts in Translating* are contained in chapters three and seven: chapter three

provides insights into Nida's theory of the importance of contextual analysis in translating; chapter seven addresses the concepts of translation, in general, and the influences they may have on each other. *Contexts in Translating* presents a wide range of sophisticated, though sometimes overly anecdotal, ideas concerning the role of contexts in the process of translation. This text is probably most appropriate for use in a graduate college course specializing in translation studies.

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