Rethinking the Relationship between Text and Context in Translation

Juliane House

Abstract

Research on texts as units larger than sentences has a rich tradition in translation studies. The notion of context, its relation to text, and the role it plays in translation has, however, received much less attention. In this paper, I have made a fresh attempt at conceptualising the relationship between context and text for translation and presented a new theory of re-contextualisation that explicates the relationship between context and text in its design and its categorial scheme. A growing influence which may threaten traditional processes of re-contextualisation in translation, i.e. the increasing influence of English as a global lingua franca on translation and on addressee expectation norms in other language communities and cultures, is also discussed.

1. Clarifying the Notions “Text” and “Context”

The notions “text” and “context” are of crucial importance for translation. Why this is so and which view of context is useful for translation theory are, however, often not clear-cut. In the following, I will first attempt to define “text” and “context”. Secondly, having established that exploration, I will critically review the meaning of “context” from the perspectives of a variety of disciplines. Thirdly, I will draw some conclusions from this review and suggest a way in which context can be fruitfully integrated into a theory of translation as re-contextualisation. Fourthly and finally, I will briefly examine whether and how globalised information processes and the current dominance of global English transform the nature of the relationship between text and context in translation and multilingual text production.