

On a Peircean Semiotic Turn of Semiotranslation

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The influence exerted by Peirce's semeiotic on Translation Studies 'has been close to nil'. Nothing has yet happened that looks like a 'semiotic turn in translation studies'. This is surprising. Peirce's pragmatic model of meaning as the 'action of signs' (*semiosis*) has had a deep impact on philosophy, psychology, theoretical biology, linguistics, and cognitive sciences, besides all branches of semiotics. Why is such an influence not observed in a field of studies so strongly impregnated by semiotic notions, like translation studies? How could such an influence be exerted? Douglas Robinson's book is about these questions. His book is not a review or analysis of the reasons why a 'semiotic turn in translation studies' has never happened. In fact, it is mainly about Dinda Górlée's works. Górlée has forged the most systematic inter-theoretical relationship between Peirce's semeiotic and Translation Studies. Her papers and books tentatively build an initial step of a Peircean transformation in Translation Studies' research agenda. In our opinion, if this project has not succeeded yet, Robinson's book will not accomplish it either. Why? Because it does not explore the implications resulting from a rigorous mapping between fundamental premises, problems, methods and models delineating the research domains. Even so, Douglas Robinson's book is an important and necessary work to understand the difficulties involved in this project. His main ideas regarding the possibility of an inter-theoretical relationship are found in chapters 1 and 4 (other chapters are presented as case studies and empirical descriptions.) In these chapters, we find (non-systematically) many of Peirce's ideas on semiosis, phenomenological categories, abductive inference, etc. It is a good supposition that the exploration of these ideas should produce a remarkable set of unprecedented consequences (otherwise it is a useless academic cost).

Here we would like to show or begin to show how some Peircean ideas can work as 'cognitive-pumps' in this inter-theoretical mapping. It is not a trivial task to select what really matters. We will inevitably be opportunistic in doing so.

(1) *Translation (or Semiotranslation) is semiosis*: This is not to say that a translation is done with signs. Translation *is* semiosis. (Note that the fundamental explanatory building-block is not the sign, but *semiosis*, the action of sign.) The concept of translation is necessarily tied to the notion of semiosis: it is grounded on the notion of semiosis, and it stresses a level of description in which the processes are treated as semiotic processes. The question ‘what is translation?’ is thus related to the question ‘what is semiosis?’. What are the implications of this assertion? In our opinion, the book does not explore all the consequences of this relation (translation = semiosis). Peirce’s processual philosophy conceives of semiosis as an emergent pattern of organization of habits. This process is materially embodied and situated, cumulative and self-organized, and pre-eminently communicational. Semiosis evolves, and exhibits a rich variety of morphological patterns.

(2) *Semiosis is a triadic relation*: Any description of semiosis should necessarily treat it as a relation constituted by three irreducibly connected terms - sign, object, interpretant (S-O-I, in short), which are its minimal constitutive elements (EP 2:171). S in S-O-I is the entity, structure or process being employed by a cognitive system to *stand for* something else. O in S-O-I is something else that the sign *stands for*. This object should be understood not as a substance, property or thing in itself, but as another sign or a semiotic process. I in S-O-I is an effect produced in a (‘distributed’) cognitive system by the use of S as regulated by O. It is relevant that semiosis is characterized as triadically irreducible. In an irreducible triad, what brings together all the terms of the relational complex cannot be any sum of dyadic correlations between the terms. By applying Peirce’s model of semiosis, the phenomenon of translation is observed as essentially triadic, interpreter and context-dependent. Any relation between a sign and its object depends on an interpretant. A consequence of this qualification is that whenever we are describing a meaning relation we have to make a reference to who is this relation meaningful for. (The pronoun ‘who’, here, does not refer necessarily to psychological agents, but to any kind of cognitive, interpretative, system.) Another consequence of the formal definition of semiosis as a triadic relation is that sign, object and interpretant are viewed as functional roles (see Savan 1987-88: 43). These roles can be taken by virtually any entity or process, provided that the interpretant is an effect produced in a cognitive system. Furthermore, the same entity or process can take different roles in different meaning relations. For example, an interpretant in a given S-O-I relation can immediately take the role of a sign in another S-O-I relation. Semiotic relations are not isolated, but connected in temporally and spatially distributed chains and webs.

If translation is semiosis, the above description also corresponds to a minimal formal description of what a translation is. In a translation, the semiotic relation S-O-I describes how a translation source is translated into a different semiotic system, resulting in a translation target. As I have explored in other articles, there are at least two possible ways of mapping a translation source and a translation target to the S-O-I triad (Queiroz and Atã, in press; Queiroz &

Aguiar 2015): either the source is the sign (S) and the target is the interpretant (I) (model 1, see figure 2), or the source is the object (O) and the target is the sign (S) (model 2, see figure 3):

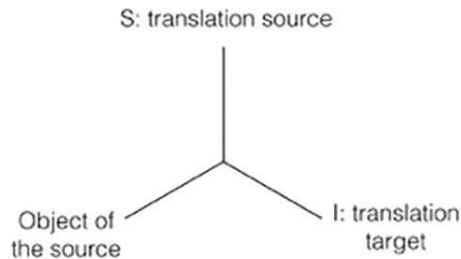


Figure 1. Model 1 of translation. In this case the translation source is a sign, which mediates an object so as to determine the translation target as an effect. Note that this model graphically represents the object of the source, but not the effect of the target on its interpreters. Model 1 describes how, through a translation source, a certain pattern of constraints acts on a cognitive system so as to produce a translation target. The translation target is determined by the object of the source through the mediation of the translation source (I is determined by O through S).

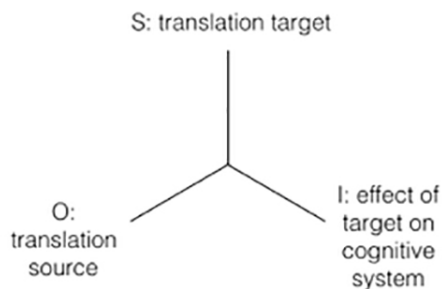


Figure 2. Model 2 of translation. In this case the sign is the translation target, which mediates a translation source (viewed not necessarily as a 'substance', but as another semiotic process), so as to determine an effect on an cognitive system. Note that this model shows directly the translation source, but does not show directly the object of the source. This model represents graphically the effect of the target on a cognitive system as determined by the translation source through mediation of the translation target.

What are the implications of modelling a translation through model 1 or model 2? The two models are not two different types of translation, but show different aspects of a same phenomenon. Model 1 places the translation source in the functional role of the sign, and includes the object of the translation source in the model. It shows how the object of the translation source is co-dependent on the translation target: different intersemiotic translations of the same source will stress, unveil and/or construe different semiotic objects. Also, model 1 places the target semiotic system in the functional role of a cognitive system. Model 2 places the translation target in the functional role of sign, and includes the interpretants of the target in the model. The object of the triad is the translation source. In this model we have the notion that a translation target stands for a translation source. This S-O connection, is, of

course, dependent on interpretative effects being produced in a cognitive system. An obvious example of a cognitive system is an audience. Thus, model 2 captures the notion that a work is perceived by an audience as a translation of another work. However, the interpreter cognitive system doesn't have to be an audience.

(3) *Semiosis is a telic process*: Semiosis is, according to several authors, the most general description of the internal structure of final causality. As efficient causation is a dyadic relation between two events, final causation is an irreducible triadic relation that connects, by the mediation of a general possibility, two facts. (Notice that a final state is not conceived in this case as a static final point, but as a general possibility.) Efficient causation is exemplified by blind compulsive relation between two events (Secondness). As an important component of Peirce's evolutionary thought, final causation evolves ('developmental teleology', cf. EP 1: 313).

(4) *Peirce is a process philosopher*: Peirce's theory of signs is processualist. Processualism refers to the application of a philosophy of processes, as opposed to a philosophy of substances. Processes are coordinated occurrences of changes in reality (Rescher 1996). A process ontology stresses emergent properties and change as more fundamental than stability. The contrasting notion is that of substance ontology. Substance ontology stresses properties as intrinsically possessed by substances, and stresses stability as more fundamental than change (Bickhard 2011, Seibt 2012). In Peircean semiotics, one central concept that captures this processualist concern is the notion of habit (Atã and Queiroz 2016). A habit is a 'pattern of constraints', a 'conditional proposition' stating that certain things would happen under specific circumstances (EP 2.388), a 'rule of action' (CP 5.397, CP 2.643), a disposition to act in certain ways under certain circumstances, especially when the carrier of the habit is stimulated, animated, or guided by certain motives (CP 5.480), or, simply, a 'permanence of some relation' (CP 1.415). In Peircean philosophy, acquisition of stable regularities is described as a process of 'taking habits', which is probabilistic and cumulative. This view of change and stability, through accumulation of self-generated probabilistic regularities, is at the core of the process of semiosis, since 'what a thing means is simply what habits it involves' (CP 5.400). This corresponds to a process-ontological basis for semiosis.

(5) *Semiosis is an emergent self-organizing process*: Peirce's processual philosophy conceives of semiosis as an emergent pattern of organization of habits. For Rosenthal (1994: 27), meanings should be understood as relational structures that emerge from patterns of behavior. The term 'emergence' is frequently employed in an intuitive and ordinary way, referring to the idea of a 'creation of new properties'. In a technical sense, 'emergent' properties can be understood as a class of higher-level properties related in a certain way to the microstructure of a system. In other papers, we have claimed (Loula et al. 2010) that semiosis can be described as an emergent self-organizing process in a complex system of sign users interacting locally and mutually affecting each other. A communication event irreducibly involves an utterer, a sign and an interpreter, in which an utterer transmits a form (*habit*), through the sign, to an interpreter.

In a communication process, '[i]t is convenient to speak as if the sign originated with an utterer and determined its interpretant in the mind of an interpreter' (MS 318: 11).

(6) *'Out of our heads' - semiosis is materially embodied and situated:* Meaning (*semiosis*) is not in the sign, in some semiotic-head (intracranial or neuronally-based system of symbols), in the referent of the sign, or in the medium by which the sign is transmitted to its potential receiver and interpreter. Semiosis conceived in terms of communication process leads us to another important implication, specially when associated to Peirce's semiotic model of mind, that frontally collides with orthodox cognitive science (both classical and connectionist) and Computational Theory of Mind. According to Peirce, cognitive processes fundamentally depend on semiotic processes, in a sense that diverges radically from internalism. For Peirce, thinking involves the process of sign action. Against any form of internalism, Peirce can be considered a precursor of the extended mind and distributed cognition thesis (Clark 1997). But, differently from the anti-cartesianism defended by some embodied-embedded cognitive science, which is predominantly anti-representationalist, as recently explored in a Merleau-Pontyan (Dreyfus 2002), Heideggerian (Wheeler 2005), or Gibsonian (Chemero 2007) manner, for Peirce, mind is semiosis in a dialogical - hence communicational - materially embodied form, and cognition is the development of available semiotic material artifacts in which it is embodied as a power to produce interpretants. It takes the form of the development of cognitive or semiotic artifacts, such as writing tools, instruments of observation, notational systems, languages, and so forth, as stressed by Skagestad (2004) and Ransdell (2003) with respect to the concept of intelligence augmentation.

In contrast to a strong internalist trend in the Philosophy of Translation, *translation* (via Peirce) is a process centered on the design and exploration of external cognitive tools and artifacts (materials, procedures, protocols, rules, mind structures, cultural and physical tools, etc). What does that mean? In terms of explanatory modeling, cognitive process of translation is usually associated with mental abilities. The main research problems are framed in an internalist framework, according to which cognition is described as the processing of internal representations, and, accordingly, the notion of 'sign' in translation is understood as similar to cognitivist representation. A Peircean narrative suggests something different - translation is described as a non-psychological process, materially and socially distributed in space-time, and strongly based on the design and use of external cognitive artifacts. This situated view of cognition doesn't see the individual agent (translator) as the center of creative processes, but as a participant in the wider cognitive systems, dependent on cognitive cultural ecologies.

(7) *Semiosis includes not only merely concepts (thought-signs) but also events and qualities:* It is well known that sign-mediated processes show a notable variety. There are three fundamental kinds of signs underlying meaning processes – icons, indexes, and symbols. But the morphological space of semiotic processes includes proto-symbols and many variations of indexical and iconic processes. (And there is no way to describe these processes with some

degree of accuracy by examining only the sign-object relationship.) In an attempt to advance his project of classifying semiosis, Peirce proposed several typologies, with different degrees of refinement. Few semioticians have approached his extended typologies of signs (10 and 66 classes of signs), developed from 1903, which still seem obscure, structurally intricate and hard to apply to empirical phenomena. To make things worse, it remains the tendency to think that the extended typologies are extravagant and unproductive conceptual tools. Indeed, Peircean mature typologies provide a detailed description of several interrelated aspects involved in semiosis, including the intrinsic nature of signs and the effect on the semiotic agents (Queiroz 2012). According to Peirce's ten classes, a sign is grounded in some property, event, or regular pattern, by virtue of which it stands for some quality, occurrence, or law to a third element, an interpretation of possibility, physical connection or rule-based tendency (W 1:332-333).

(8) *Abduction is the core of translation*: Peircean semiotics are based on certain premises that give a broad scope to the concept of inference. Under this broad application, logical inferential activity is taken to be more ubiquitous than otherwise. It includes any kind of reasoning, and is also extended to certain perceptual processes ('perceptual judgments') (CP 5.180-194). Such ubiquity of inferential processes in cognition is largely due to the notion of abductive inference (Paavola 2011, 2014). Abduction is an ampliative inference that moves from facts to explanatory hypotheses to these facts. It is the kind of inference which is related to creativity, 'the only kind of argument which starts a new idea' (CP 2.96). It appears as an 'act of insight' that 'comes to us like a flash' (CP 5.181). It is the inference through which new knowledge can be obtained: 'Abduction consists in studying the facts and devising a theory to explain them' (CP 2.96), 'all that makes knowledge applicable comes to us via abduction' (MS 692). Under a Peircean framework, the kind of reasoning involved in translation must be mainly abductive: a translation is hypothetical, creative (ampliative), and probabilistic.

Quasi-concluding: Anderson's book question becomes: How to tentatively build a theoretical frame to the phenomenon of translation mainly inspired by (and based on) Peirce's Pragmatism and Semeiotic? Anderson's book integrates a list of important projects designed to reshape the range of problems that structures the theoretical research agenda in Translation Studies. (Surprisingly, this list is too small, and is starred by a single author, who is Dinda Gorlee.) Of course, much still needs to be done. But where should we start? In our opinion, it is still necessary to explore, in a more systematic way, (i) the main premises of Peirce's process philosophy, especially in its mature phase (post-1903); (ii) the effects that arise directly from the introduction of new premises into problems considered fundamental (e.g., analogy source-target); (iii) comparison between 'new and old' agendas - it is not only about the implications, in terms of reformulating the main problems, but a comparison between the agendas in terms of explanatory power, parsimony, internal consistency and robustness, etc. A good example of the need for clarifying theoretical premises and their impacts is the insistence on the idea that translation is an *iconic* process. What does such an affirmation mean when we consider Peirce's

post-1903 thought? What does *iconicity* entail in light of the subdivisions of the icon (image, diagram, metaphor), and recent theoretical developments about diagrammatic reasoning in Cognitive Semiotics?

In concert with the ideas introduced here, *translation* (or *semiotranslation*) is a triadic, context-sensitive (historically and physically situated), interpretant-dependent (dialogic), materially extended (embodied) abductive process. This view emphasizes self-organizing process and emergence. Translation is not 'representational' (à la internalist paradigm), but a distributed (non-agent centered) 'semiotic' process. It includes a remarkable variety of semiotic forms and structures - not merely concepts (legisigns), but also events (sinsigns) and qualities (qualisigns). Robinson's book has the main merit of drawing the attention of philosophers and theorists of translation to the possible effects of Peircean ideas. But it is not clear yet *how* the panorama that arises from these ideas may provide a different view of the examined phenomenon, and a new agenda of empirically treatable problems.

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