

Construction of Translating Mind Inspired By Victorious Welby'S Significs

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Abstract: This article mainly explores Lady Victoria Welby's translation notion within the frame of her significal theory in the dialogue with or in comparison with other translation theories intending to reveal the significant role her translation notion plays in the cultivation of a translative mind. Firstly, I describe what translation is, mapping the translation studies terrain by discussing different views and key concepts regarding translation. Then the nature of Welby's translation notion and its relation to translative thinking in the process of signification will be addressed with respect to the meaning triad. Thirdly, I conclude that the cultivation of a translative mind inspired by Welby's translation theory contributes not only to the clarification and purification of language but also to the development of critical thinking as the signifying capacity grows.

1. Introduction

The conflicts and distrust between nations seemed deepened especially after the unprecedented Corona virus pandemic swept the whole world into fear and uncertainty. The call for the effective way to dialogue and communicate between nations beyond cultural and language boundaries needs to be answered immediately. The problem of communication lies in whether or not the intention and message of the sender can be effectively translated and conveyed to the receiver. In other words, the capacity of translation in the process of communication in terms of operating and processing the message or the sign determines the effect and result of communication either cross-cultural or trans-lingual. Lady Welby (1837-1912)'s significal approach to studies on signs, meaning and translation, offers the applicable solutions to most of the problems in every possible sphere of human interest and behavior and has positive prospects for progress in knowledge and understanding concerning communication. In the era of global communication today nothing seems more real and concrete than the prospect of global conflict and its many phases [...] Welby's foresight is astounding!" (Petrilli, 2009, p.99). For Welby, the cultivation of a translating mind is the key to the enhancement of communicative and expressive ability preconditioned with the willingness to listen to others. I will therefore in this article demonstrate the necessity of the cultivation of a translative mind by exploring Welby's ideas for translation and interpretation with special reference to the problem of meaning, especially her idea on "translation" as a method for "translative and critical thinking" that facilitate communication and produces new knowledge.

2. Welby's Translation Notion in the Frame of Significs

2.1 Connotation of Significs

Significs is coined by Victoria Welby to designate her approach to the study of sign and meaning and interpretation/translation and the term was officially introduced in her essay of 1896, "*Sense and Meaning and Interpretation.*" The entry 'Significs' created by Welby, appeared in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1911 as following: Significs: 1) Significs implies a careful distinction between a) sense or Signification (q.v.), b) meaning or Intention (q.v), and c) significance or ideal Worth (q.v.). It will be seen that the reference of the first is mainly verbal (or rather Sensal, q. v.), of the second volitional, and of the third moral (e.g. we speak of some event 'the significance of which cannot be overrated'; it would be impossible in such a case to substitute the 'sense' or the 'meaning' of such event, without serious loss). Significs treats of the relation of signs in the widest sense to each of these. 2) A proposed method of mental training, aiming at the concentration of intellectual activities on that which is implicitly assumed to constitute the primary and ultimate value of every form of study: i.e. what is at present indifferently called its meaning or sense, its import or significance. Based on the definition above, we can see that Welby's primary aim with her significs was to improve communicative, expressive and interpretive potentials by distinguishing with cultivated awareness of different levels of meanings (from lowest to the highest, sense, meaning and significance) which are generated through ongoing translation in the semiotic process. Translation scholar Susan Bassnett (1991[1980], p.13) confirmed the semiotic approach to the study of translation by saying "Although translation has a central core of linguistic activity, it belongs most properly to semiotics, the science that studies sign systems or structures, sign processes and sign functions."

Welby introduced her scientific theory of significs in a translative and dialogic spirit through the constant epistles communicating with the distinguished figures of her time. The significance and rich application prospect of translation in every possible sphere of human behavior ought to be scrutinized under the scope of Welby's significal thought system as the whole universe is permeated with meaning. Welby herself applied the translative mindset into her researches through dialogues and letters with more than 400 figures of her time. Petrilli points out that Welby's "significs" aims to establish a scientific method to the study of different sciences of sign and meaning, language and communication [...] and to develop a more comprehensive analysis keeping account of the different dimensions and their interconnectedness in the life of signs and interpretation, from the linguistic, philosophical, logical, psychological, anthropological pedagogical, sociological, to the axiological, etc. (Petrilli, 2009, p. 254 cited in Nuessel)

2.2 Translation and Meaning Triad

From the significal perspective, interconnectedness between translation, meaning, and cognitive processes, between translative processes and Welby's meaning triad 'sense,' 'meaning,' and 'significance' (these terms indicate a progressive advancement from the lowest to the highest grades in expression value in concrete situations of communicative interaction) is the key to the understanding of the mechanism of her translation theory to the facilitation and promotion of the communication. The closer look into Welby's meaning triad will help us on the one hand get a better grasp of her translation theory since these two concepts translation and meaning are interwoven in the process of sign activity, and provides an option to avoid misunderstanding and confusion as far as the communication of any kind, verbal or non-verbal is concerned on the other hand. As Welby says in *What is Meaning?*:

There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as the Sense of a word, but only the sense in which it is

used – the circumstances, state of mind, reference, ‘universe of discourse’ belonging to it. The Meaning of a word is the intent which it is desired to convey – the intention of the user. The Significance is always manifold, and intensifies its sense as well as its meaning, by expressing its importance, its appeal to us, its moment for us, its emotional force, its ideal value, its moral aspects, its universal or at least social range. (Welby 1983 [1903], pp.5–6)

The terms “sense”, “meaning” and “significance” indicate three different aspects of signifying processes, three progressive and interrelated phases in the development of the capacity for expression, interpretation and signification in relation to experience, practice, to signifying behavior such as verbal or non-verbal communication. Meaning increases and progresses from the lowest level to the highest as interpretive-translative processes develop through the open network of signs. The sign’s meaning is engendered in the interpretive-translative procedures of signifying and communicative processes. The more interpretive-translative processes multiply, the more the signifying universe expands, and with this our understanding of life. Thanks to the continuous work of translation, the sign develops its meaning in another sign that transcends and enriches it. Therefore, the more the sign translates into different spheres of thought, branches of science, and fields of practical experience, ready always to transcend its own limits, the more it is ‘plastic,’ the higher the degree in signifying potential and significance. On this account interpretation-translation is not only a question of signs identifying other signs, but also of what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as ‘answering comprehension’ or ‘responsive understanding’ among signs. This is based on the logic of otherness as opposed to the logic of identity, and as such is inseparable from listening and opening to the other, hospitality in relation to the word of the other (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005).

Welby’s signficant approach to meaning generated through ongoing translation interpretation sheds light on the problem of communication and understanding. , critical, creative and responsive understanding. Her critical view on translation within the frame of signficant is based on her discovery that humans are endowed with a unique intellectual capacity of translation that transcending limits of discipline, language and culture. Effective communication between different cultures and nations can be achieved through the developed capacity of translation transcending different sign groups or systems. Similar to Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914) ’s “whole universe is perfused with signs” (EP 2: 394), Welby holds the view that the whole universe is permeated with meaning. According to Welby, relation between sign, meaning, and value is of central importance in every sphere of human behavior with thought process included. (Deely, 2013, p.196) Since translation is parallel to signifying or thought process, sign process is the process of translating act. As a form of signifying process, the quality of communication is determined by the ability to translate. The construction of translative mind guarantees the smooth growth of meaning from sense to significance as the requirement for the better communicative effect is needed in order to avoid confusion or even conflicts caused by misunderstanding of the meaning of sign process. Interpretive creativity, dialogism and otherness characterize the open-ended signifying processes which generate the meaning escalating gradually from primary level to the highest one, termed as “sense”, “meaning” and “significance” as the translative activities accompany the signifying process. (Petrilli, 2019, p. 219)

3. Cultivation of a Translative Mind

3.1 Translative Mind in Translative Thinking

English translation theorist Peter Newmark (1916–2011) in his *Paragraphs on Translation* (1993: x) expresses his idea of translation as mental process saying “As an excuse, I can always have recourse to Ramon [sic] Jakobson’s and George Steiner’s thesis that virtually any mental process is translation.” Similarly, Juri Lotman (1922–1993) used translation in a non-translation technical

sense when stating that “translation is the elementary act of thinking” (Lotman, 1990, p.143). These two prominent scholars saw the close connection between translation and thinking, for them, translation is thinking or thinking process is translation. Victoria Welby describes man's capacity for signification in terms of “translative thinking,” an automatic process “in which everything suggests or reminds us of something else” (Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 34). Understood in her signifi- cal or semiotic terms, translation occurs in semiotic process in which one sign is translated or interpreted into another sign, a different sign, in which something stands for something else, in which different sign systems are related. “Translation” in Welby’s signifi- cation is a kind of autonomous “transformation” in the brain, an automatic cognitive activity that cannot be cancelled, or in other words a thought translation.

For Welby, translation exists as a methodology; one of the roots of meaning confusion of her time lies in the stagnation or degeneration of the autonomous translation function. It follows therefore that the cultivation of translation capacity in and out of the classroom contributes significantly to the development of critical consciousness as translation takes place to acquire and verify the knowledge or experience among different signs, systems concerning language, communication and cognition. Whatever the case the first need is to develop the power of translation between “mind” and “mind”: the power that passes or grows in “mind”: and the corresponding power of interpreting, understanding and finally translating expression of every kind and of every degree of complexity and subtlety. (Welby 1897, p.16 cited in Neubauer 2013)

3.2 Translative Mind in Critical Thinking

Translation is not only a practice, but also a method of interpretation and understanding, of investigation and discovery, of verification and acquisition of new knowledge, and as such is also a method of critique. Moreover, translation theory can also be a theory that reflects on sign and meaning. Such an approach can contribute to a better understanding of the practice of translation. As a science of critique and reflection on every sphere of human practice where sign activity is involved, translative thinking of signifi- cation is a central idea in the constitution of meaning. Translation or translative mindset from signifi- cal perspective bears a strong tendency for the logic of otherness, understood as the foundational dimension of the sign, based on listening to the other, and caring for the other. Signifi- cation presents itself as that discipline that is capable of “saying something” about the object of other sciences without limitations, simply because they all have something to do with signs, in one way or another. In *What is Meaning?* Welby introduced the term “translation” by underlining its broad scope, much in line with Roman Jakobson’s (1896–1982) notions of intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translations from the essay “*On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*” (1959). American semiotician Charles Peirce (CP 2.230) stated that “nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign”, that signs do not exist without an interpretant (CP2.228), that the meaning of a sign can only be expressed by another sign acting as its interpretant. These ideas can be summarized as translation is constitutive of the sign, parallel to Welby’s ([1903] 1983, 34) idea: “We cannot cancel the automatic process of translative thinking. Everything suggests or reminds us of something else”. Susan Petrilli (2001, pp. 278–279) the core researcher of Lady Welby states that translating and translatability “are prerogatives of semiosis and of the sign. Translation, therefore, is a phenomenon of sign reality and as such it is the object of study of semiotics”

Welby broke new ground as she conducted the sense of ‘translation’ into the territory of reflection on sign and meaning, proposing a theory of translation understood as a cognitive interpretive method involving all signifying processes. We know that she began focusing on the relation between signifying and interpreting practices in her early book of 1881, *Links and Clues*,

where she identified four principles of interpretation addressed to: 1) the problem of literal meaning; 2) the risk of leveling sense; 3) the importance of context; and 4) the problem of dialectics as a condition for unity. (1881, pp. 31-36).

From a signficant perspective translation involves comparison, association and analogy among different fields and dominions of knowledge and experience, among different sign systems. Therefore beyond the ordinary sense of shift from one historical natural language to another, Welby theorized translation in terms of interpretation, that is, interpretation of one sign with another. Knowledge, meaning and experience are generated and develop thanks to interpretive-translative processes thus described in the encounter among signs from different sign systems, linguistic and nonlinguistic signs, among different historical natural languages, among special languages and linguistic registers within the same historical natural language, etc. Indeed, all sign systems, all languages are already in themselves interpretation-translation processes as we are describing them.

Welby's point was that translation from one system to another was instrumental to the development of meaning in all its nuances, of knowledge, critical consciousness and ultimately of significance. With reference to the typology introduced by Roman Jakobson in his famous essay of 1959, '*On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*' (Petrilli, 2003, pp. 17-20), Welby was concerned with translation firstly as a cognitive method, 'reformulation,' 'definition,' in a broad and plastic sense, and only consequently in the more obvious sense of shift from one language to another, 'interlingual translation.' Without ignoring the specificity of communication among different historical-natural languages, she considered this particular translative practice as part of the larger framework, a methodological perspective for the acquisition of new knowledge. Therefore, more than on interlingual translation or translation properly understood (shift from one language to another, interpreting verbal signs of a given historical-natural language by means of the verbal signs of another historical natural language), to use Jakobson's terminology Welby's focus was on intralingual translation or rewording (interpreting verbal signs by means of other verbal signs from the same historical natural language) and intersemiotic translation.

In *What is Meaning?*, Welby describes intellectual activity, progress in knowledge and experience in terms of the 'automatic process of translative thinking,' in which through the use of metaphor and analogy 'everything suggests or reminds us of something else' (Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 34). 'Translative thinking' converges with signifying and semiotic processes at large in which something stands for something else, its meaning, which is generated through the translation of signs into other signs, into different types of signs and different sign systems. Continuous translative-interpretive processes enhance our capacity for significance as they sharpen perception of unforeseen connections, discovery of knowledge and truth previously unknown. Translation in all senses is possible on the basis of a common element among differences, in other words on the basis of the relation of similarity, whether analogical or homological, uniting things that are apparently unrelated thereby enhancing meaning value, as anticipated, in terms of significance. (Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 148-150)

4. Conclusion

Significs is a method for the enhancement of meaning and awareness, of significance through translative processes which are a condition for communication, understanding and interpretation, for signifying behavior generally (Petrilli, 2003b). Significs provides us with a scientific way on how to cultivate a translative mind as a constructive option to the solution to the problems caused by misunderstanding or confusion in different layer of the meaning in the process of communication. Significs being applied appropriately, will help test and evaluate the effectiveness of any and all forms of communicative interactions by either asking simply questions or think with these questions

like “in what sense, on what ground, with what reference are you working, thinking, speaking?” “What do you intend to convey, to induce, to suggest, to imply by your act, your attitude, your procedure or abstention or refusal; by speaking or declining to speak?” “And what is the essential significance of any of these activities and all others worthy the name?” “To what do they point, at what do they hint, what may they reveal?” before or during the process of communication as a way to clarify thoughts and avoid misunderstanding through ongoing translative-interpretive process of obtaining clearer and higher level of meaning of any signifying behavior or communicative interaction.

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