

Reconceptualizing Translation in Light of Complexity Thinking: From Translation Turns to the Translation Complex

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Abstract

There are various theoretical perspectives from which the ‘translation’ concept is perceived, ranging from the early linguistic approach that emphasized equivalence to cultural, social, and functional approaches, which have broadened the concept to a communicative act conditioned by actors, context, and the text's purpose and function. However, this accumulation of translation definitions has often led to the fragmentation of the concept through its study in separate turns, highlighting some elements while marginalizing others, making it difficult to arrive at an inclusive conception of translation. Accordingly, this study aims to trace the conceptual development of translation definitions through a critical and analytical reading of the most important approaches that have shaped the field, and then employ complexity theory/thinking as a unifying framework to reconceptualize translation as

a complex reality and a dynamic, adaptive system whose meaning is based on the reciprocal and non-linear interaction between language, culture, socio-historical context, and function of the text. Hence, it contributes theoretically by proposing an inclusive definition of translation from a complexity perspective. The study concludes that conceptualizing translation as a 'complex' rather than 'turns' allows for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the concept and establishes common ground that can benefit researchers, students, trainers, and practitioners in describing the translation phenomenon and guiding translation practice.

Keywords: Translation, Conceptual development, Complexity theory, Translation turns, Translation complex

1. Introduction

Since the mid-20th century, translation studies have undergone remarkable theoretical development, contributing to the establishment of translation as an independent, multidisciplinary field. This development is reflected in the multiplicity of approaches that have sought to explain the phenomenon of translation, ranging from early linguistic approaches that focused on concepts of equivalence and transformation, through cultural and functional approaches, to social and psychological studies that broadened the scope of translation. This theoretical diversity has enabled the uncovering of different dimensions of translation and has enriched its conception from multiple perspectives. For instance, from a linguistic point of view, translation was earlier considered a matter of equivalence by Nida (1964) and Newmark (1981). After that, translation was maintained by Bassnett and Lefevere (1998) not only as linguistic transfer but also as a cross-cultural activity, focusing on topics such as ideology and ethics that have emerged as crucial concepts in translation studies. Later, Apter (2006) and Gentzler (2008) believed that translation is a significant social activity that influences the development of national identity. The development of translation theory can also be understood through the circulation of influential conceptual ideas within this field. As Andrew Chesterman (2016) explains, theoretical concepts such as equivalence, culture, purpose, ideology, and translator agency in translation studies function as 'memes', that is, conceptual units that spread, evolve, and interact within the academic community. These conceptual memes help shape different theoretical trends and guide research directions in the field. In his recent work, Anthony Pym argues that translation can be more accurately understood as managing communicative risks rather than simply seeking equivalence between texts. From this perspective, translation involves managing various risks that may arise in intercultural communication, particularly when cultural differences increase the likelihood of misunderstanding. Therefore, translators make strategic decisions to minimize the risk of communication failure and to maintain cooperation among the parties involved in the communication process (Pym, 2025). Viewing translation as risk management reinforces the complexity-based perspective adopted by this study, since translation decisions are shaped by the interaction among a set of constraints, uncertainties, and communicative goals within what can be called the broader translational complex. However, this accumulation of knowledge has concurrently led to divergent conceptions of translation. Each is often linked to a specific theoretical framework that highlights one dimension while marginalizing others. Consequently, partial definitions have been produced that reflect a particular perspective

rather than the nature of translation as a complex phenomenon. This problem is embodied in the prevalence of what are known as ‘translational turns’, which, despite their methodological validity, have led translation to be studied in different turns rather than as a structurally complex phenomenon. This status quo creates a conceptual problem: the lack of a comprehensive framework that explains how linguistic, cultural, social, historical, and cognitive dimensions interact within the translation process. Theoretical debate often remains focused on determining which perspective best explains translation, rather than examining the dynamic relationship between these perspectives. This results in treating translation as a process that can be analyzed into separate units, reflecting a reductionist approach that fails to grasp the complexity of translation practice.

In this context, complexity thinking emerges as a theoretical framework capable of overcoming this problem. According to Kobus Marais and Reine Meylaerts (2019, 2024), its conceptual tools treat phenomena as dynamic, open systems characterized by nonlinearity, interactivity, emergence, and feedback. This perspective allows translation to be treated, not only as a linear transfer between two texts but as a communicative and cognitive activity in which meaning is formed from the interaction of a network of overlapping factors within changing contexts. Accordingly, this study seeks to reconceptualize translation by employing complexity thinking as a theoretical framework to understand it as a complex reality and a dynamic, adaptive system. Instead of viewing translational turns as opposing trends or successive historical phases, the study proposes considering them as complementary dimensions that collectively shape what is termed the ‘translation complex’. This approach aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of translation that reflects its interactive and evolving nature. It helps to transcend the traditional dichotomies that have long dominated translational thought. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its theoretical contribution to building a comprehensive conceptual framework that reorganizes the understanding of translation and provides an interpretive foundation for academic research, translation education, the study of translational creativity, and the analysis of translation practices in contemporary contexts. Through this framework, the study seeks to contribute to the development of a theoretical perspective more consistent with the complexity of linguistic and communicative reality in a globalized world.

2. Evolution of the Concept of Translation

The term ‘translation’ derives from the Latin word “*translatio* (‘transporting’); itself coming from the participle of the verb *transfere* (‘to carry over’)” (Munday, 2016, p. 8). Both terms convey the sense of continuing to exist, but in different situations. At the very heart of the term is the configuration of the source language text (ST) and the target language text (TT). Though practiced for a long time, Newmark (1981, p. 4) noted that little was written about translation and that the main focus was whether it should be free or literal, i.e., sense-for-sense or word-for-word. This debate was present not only in the West but also in China and the Arab world, with rich traditions of translation (Munday, 2016, p. 33). Jakobson (1959/ 2012, p. 127), a scholar often quoted when translation is mentioned, defined translation proper, i.e., from one natural language into another, from the semiotic point of view: “Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by

means of some other language”.

2.1 Translation in Early Linguistic Approaches

Catford (1965, p. 1) linked translation to a general linguistic theory at the very beginning of his book by stating that “Translation is an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another. Clearly, then, any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language—a general linguistic theory”. Nida (1964), and Nida and Taber (1969) were influenced by Chomsky’s generative-transformational model. Like Chomsky, they treated the kernel sentences as “the basic structural elements out of which language builds its elaborate surface structures” (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 39). Newmark (1981, p. 38) toned down Nida’s principle of equivalent effect and maintained that attaining it is “illusory” because “the conflict of loyalties, the gap between emphasis on source and target language will always remain as the overriding problem in translation theory and practice”. Koller (1979, pp. 176-191, as cited in Munday, 2016, pp. 74-75) refined the concept of equivalence as opposed to correspondence. Correspondence concerns contrastive linguistics, in which two language systems are compared to describe their similarities and differences. In contrast, equivalence concerns items that are equivalent in certain ST-TT pairs and contexts. Despite these scholars’ contributions to the field of translation, their more formalist linguistic approach was obvious.

2.2 Cultural Turn and Expanding the Concept of Translation

A marked shift from the linguistic approach was advocated by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, as cited in Bassnett, 2007; Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998). This shift is known as the cultural turn in translation studies. Bassnett (2007, p. 14) explained that they were not the only translation scholars to call for a cultural turn, and that the attempt to broaden perspective beyond the text began in the 1970s. She mentioned the efforts of the Polysystems Group of Even-Zohar (1978), Toury (1978), and Holmes (1978) (as cited in Bassnett, 2007, p. 14). The polysystem approach to translation concerns the interaction between the translated literature, as a system in itself, and the larger social, literary, and historical systems of the target culture. Translation may or may not play a powerful role in this polysystem, depending on whether it aligns with the target system’s norms or the source system’s norms (Palumbo, 2009, sv *Polysystem Theory*; Laver & Mason, 2018, sv *polysystem theory*).

Translation is envisaged as a cross-cultural activity that considers not only linguistic elements but also cultural factors. It is about moving into a new cultural context and new patterns of cultural interaction. Culture is a dynamic force influencing how translation is produced and received in the target culture. According to Eco (2013), translation is “a process that takes place between two texts produced at a given historical moment in a given cultural milieu”. This view has led to the emergence of target-oriented theories of translation. As the above-mentioned quote from Bassnett clearly shows, the concentration was on literary translation. Outside this field, other scholars also stressed the influence of social and cultural factors on the target culture.

2.3 Social and Psychological Turn in Translation Studies

According to Gentzler (2008, p. 180), the social-psychological turn should be the next step in translation studies, after the cultural turn, to broaden the functional approach's perspective by integrating the social and individual effects. This turn is needed to study the importance of the geographic, social, political, and cultural aspects of translation across different social groups in the Americas, including the United States, Canada, Latin America, Brazil, and the Caribbean. Translation for those people is “ingrained in ... their very psyche” (p. 180). Drawing on insights from linguistics, philosophy, literary theory, feminism, ethnic studies, and cultural studies in the 1990s and early 2000s, Gentzler (2008, p. 2) highlighted the important role of translation as a major means for constructing culture. Any study of cultural evolution and identity formation should not overlook the role of translation.

2.4 Functional Approaches and the Target-Oriented Theory

Functional approaches view translation as an act of communication and a form of action that involves linguistic, social, and cultural factors. These approaches particularly focus on the function of the TT, which plays a vital role in determining how choices are made in translation (Palumbo, 2009, *sv. Functionalist approaches*). The function of the text is, therefore, the overriding principle in translation. Reiss (2014) regarded it as the factor determining translation strategy and criticism and linked it to text type when she published her work on translation criticism in German in 1971. She recognized four text types: content-focused which stresses the “accuracy of data”; form-focused which focuses on the “rhetorical structures [that] will achieve a comparable esthetic effect”; appeal-focused which emphasizes the “purpose intended by the original”; and audio-medial which seeks to see whether “the relevant media have been accommodated and their contributions duly incorporated” (p. 47).

Another prominent scholar who stressed the functional goal of the TT is Vermeer (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984/ 2013), who, in the 1970s, developed the Skopos Theory (*Skopostheorie*). Skopos is the Greek word for ‘aim’ or ‘purpose’. According to this theory, translation is viewed not from the perspective of meaning equivalence but from the functional purpose of the TT situation. This theory is part of the translatorial action model by Holz-Manttari (1984, as cited in Munday, 2016), who treated professional commercial translation as a communicative transaction within a sociocultural context. It involves the initiator, commissioner, and the producers, users, and receivers of the ST and TT. In his model, “the ST is ‘dethroned’, and the translation is judged not by the equivalence of meaning but by its adequacy to the functional goal of the TT situation as defined by the commission” (Munday, 2016, p. 138). A recent target-oriented theory of translation is the Variational Translation Theory drafted in China in 1998 by Huang and Zhang, and published in Chinese in 2002 (Huang, as cited in Huang & Zhang, 2020). This theory is intended to meet the special request of the target reader. According to the authors (Huang & Zhang, 2020, p. 6), translation is “a thinking and language activity in which the translator transfers the source language’s culture and information into the target language’s equivalents and tries to seek similarities between the source text and the target text”.

2.5 Recent Developments in Translation Studies

In recent years, the field of translation studies has increasingly emphasized its interdisciplinary and dynamic nature. Gambier and van Doorslaer (2016) argue that translation studies have become an interdisciplinary field that transcends the boundaries of traditional disciplines, moving from a focus on equivalence to an interest in dynamic contextual differences, while also adapting to technological developments without losing its academic complexity. Aydin (2024) reiterates that “Translation is framed as more than linguistic transfer - it is a mediator of cultural exchange, power relations, and identity formation across societies.” Contemporary researchers have broadened the scope of inquiry beyond traditional linguistic and cultural models to encompass the sociological, cognitive, and systemic dimensions of translation. In this context, Anthony Pym (2014, 2018) emphasizes the importance of translator effectiveness and professional networks in shaping translation practices within global communication systems, while Mona Baker (2018) examines the role of narratives, ideologies, and socio-political contexts in the production and circulation of translated texts. Furthermore, Kobus Marais and Reine Meylaerts (2019, 2024) have introduced a complex thinking framework as a promising approach to understanding translation, highlighting its interconnectedness, nonlinearity, and adaptivity. These contemporary trends highlight the need to view translation not as a linear transfer between two linguistic systems, but as a dynamic interaction between multiple linguistic, cultural, social, and historical components. This study starts from this premise, proposing an integrated conceptual framework known as the “translation complex” to represent the multidimensional, emerging nature of translation.

3. The Problem of ‘Turns’ in Translation Studies

The theoretical perspectives on translation, from linguistic to cross-cultural and social activities, as well as functional and target-oriented theories, allow translation to be defined and conceptualized accordingly. These theoretical perspectives adopted by the scholars who defined the term, though acknowledging previous ones, seem to stress one or more aspects of translation while excluding others. This makes it difficult to arrive at a clear conception of translation that incorporates the features necessary for the term to be meaningful and insightful. This historiographic, evaluative review of the evolution of the term ‘translation’ clearly shows that current conceptions of translation by scholars and practitioners, shaped by their own theoretical/practical perspectives, lack a comprehensive description and lead to diverse viewpoints. These competing points of view in the definitions of translation lead to analyzing translation as a series of turns rather than as a complex reality. Therefore, this study relies on complexity theory as an integrative model/framework for reconceptualizing translation as a complex phenomenon and developing an all-inclusive conception of translation. Marais & Meylaerts (2024) state that “complexity thinking offers better solutions to translation studies than do linear and reductionist thinking”.

4. Complexity Thinking as a Theoretical Framework

Complexity thinking is one of the most recent approaches to translation. Here, the tenets of ‘Complexity Theory’ are first explained to understand their relevance to translation. They

indicate how complexity theory can provide a valuable framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities of translation. Marais and Meylaerts (2024) state that “All of the complexity theory is an effort to avoid reductionism and to find ways to deal with uncertainty, indeterminacy, probabilistic data, and non-linear causality”. It reveals the dynamic, adaptive nature of the translation process, aligned with context, culture, and human judgment. The following are the tenets in more detail:

4.1 The Paradigm of Reductionism

According to Morin (2008, p. 33), reduction is “the search for elementary, simple units, the decomposition of a system into its elements, the origination of the complex to the simple.” Marais and Meylaerts (2019, p. 2) noted that translation studies have suffered from being embedded within the boundaries of the reductionist model in its quest for the decomposition of systems into elementary and simple units, and for the imposition of a “simple conceptualization on a complex reality” (Marais, 2014, p. 19). For illustration, Marais and Meylaerts (2019, p. 2) explained the limitation of this paradigm in studying audiovisual translation by asking this question:

Is it really useful to make rigorous distinctions between diverse translation types, strategies, and processes (dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, surtitling, audio description, translation, adaptation, non-translation, standardization, condensation, deletion, reformulation, normalization, etc.) instead of studying them in relation to each other as they often appear in one and the same product?

4.2 Non-linearity

Linear methodologies and linear causality are challenged in the complexity theory. According to Marais & Meylaerts (2019, p. 4), cause and effect are viewed as reciprocal:

Causes lead to effects, which can again cause effects on the initial causes, on other things, on themselves. Non-linear change or non-linear causality also means that similar causes need not lead to similar results: small differences in initial conditions may exert major influences on the eventual results, and historical influences on systems may differ so that results differ. This should prevent translation studies scholars from understanding too superficially the function and effect of various translation strategies.

4.3 Emergence

Another result of the multiple relationships within a complex system is the notion of emergence. Human (2016, p. 428) states that:

Emergence is a characteristic of a system which cannot be found or reduced to the properties of the parts which constitute that characteristic. . . . What emerges cannot be found inside the individual properties of the components but is a result of their interaction.

4.4 Binary Oppositions

Complexity theory also challenges traditional binary oppositions, such as universal/particular, local/global, mind/body, source/target, original/translation, and monolingual/multilingual. Marais and Meylaerts (2019, p.8) noted that “binary oppositions have inflicted Western thinking and that they must be reconsidered because they oblige us to reduce complex options to binaries to choose and so the complex interrelationships between these options are overlooked”. Instead, Morin introduced the notion of “reliance, a dialogic principle that stresses the unity of two opposing logics, which at the same time feed each other, make use of each other, parasite on each other” (Marais and Meylaerts, 2019, p.8). Both source and target represent the reality of translation and, from a complexity perspective, are related to one another at the edge of chaos, the creative space or moment where new meanings are created, boundaries are tested, and conceptualizations questioned.

Marais (2019b, p. 46) also noted that complexity thinking is concerned with dissipative systems, i.e., “systems that are open to their environment and dissipate their energy and/or information into the environment”. Initially, Marais (2019b) conceptualized translation from a Peircean semiotic perspective. He maintained that the word translation, as a technical term in translation studies,

refers to a semiotic process in all its complexity.... interlingual translation ... entails a process of meaning-making and meaning-taking where the process involves two different natural languages. (P. 45)

He further conceptualized what is known as an ST as “an incipient sign system” and what is known as a TT as “a subsequent sign system”, implying that neither of them is stable but part of a historical process:

The incipient sign system is simultaneously a subsequent system from previous processes, and the subsequent system is simultaneously an incipient system for subsequent processes. They are incipient and subsequent to ‘this’ particular process under description only. Also, as part of the stream of semiosis, the incipient sign system entails many streams of meaning from a variety of sources and is thus not ‘a source’ but rather a complex incipient system, hence the notion of ‘translation complex’. (P. 45)

To this end, translations can be seen as nodes in a network, connected to other texts, cultures, and historical events. Understanding these connections can help translators make more informed decisions about the translation process and lead to a more nuanced, creative, and effective approach to the field. By understanding the interconnectedness, non-linearity, and emergence of translation, translators can produce higher-quality work that is more culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate.

5. Proposed Conceptual Framework (Translation Complex)

As a result of the critical analysis of the evolution of translation concept through the various ‘turns’ in translation studies, and because of the limitations of reductionist approaches that

view translation from a single angle or dimension, this research proposes a conceptual framework based on complexity theory to reconceptualize translation as a complex and dynamic reality that cannot be reduced to linguistic transfer, equivalence, function, or culture separately.

5.1 Translation Complex as an Integrative Framework

According to this framework, translation is not a linear process in which meanings transfer from a source text to a target text. Rather, it is a complex adaptive system within which a set of overlapping subsystems interact non-linearly. These subsystems include: the incipient sign system; the subsequent sign system; the translator's cognitive and creative abilities; cultural, social, and historical contexts; institutional and ideological constraints; and the text's function and communicative purpose. These components do not operate according to a direct causal relationship, but rather within a network of reciprocal interactions and a feedback loop, where any element can influence and be reshaped by the others.

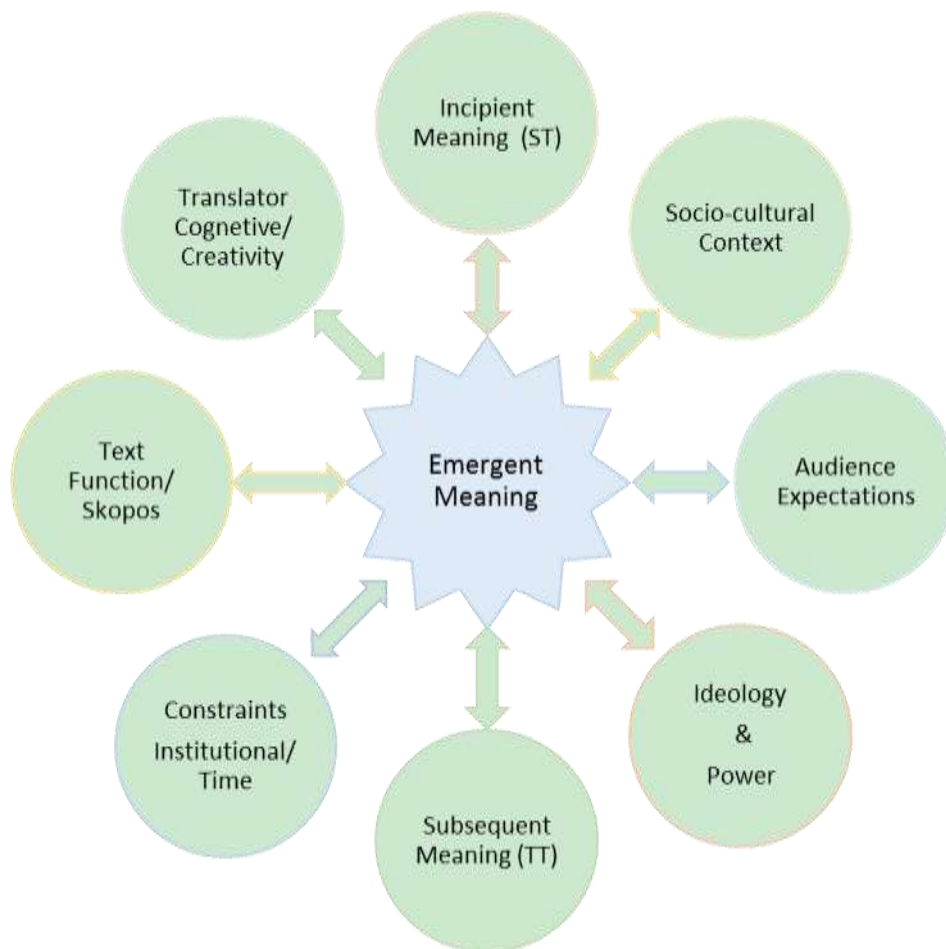


Figure 1. Translation as a complex adaptive system (core model)

From this perspective, translation is not understood as a fixed final product, but rather as a continuous semantic formation process, in which meanings arise as emerging meanings that

cannot be traced back to any single element within the system, but are formed as a result of the interaction between those elements under specific contextual conditions.

This framework also re-examines the traditional binaries that have dominated translation thinking, such as source/target, origin/translation, and fidelity/freedom, viewing them as complex, intertwined dialectical relationships rather than opposing poles. At the 'Edge of Chaos', the creative zone where the constraints of the source text intersect with the demands of the target text, the translating subject engages in negotiation and decision-making, and translational creativity emerges as an adaptive response to imbalance.

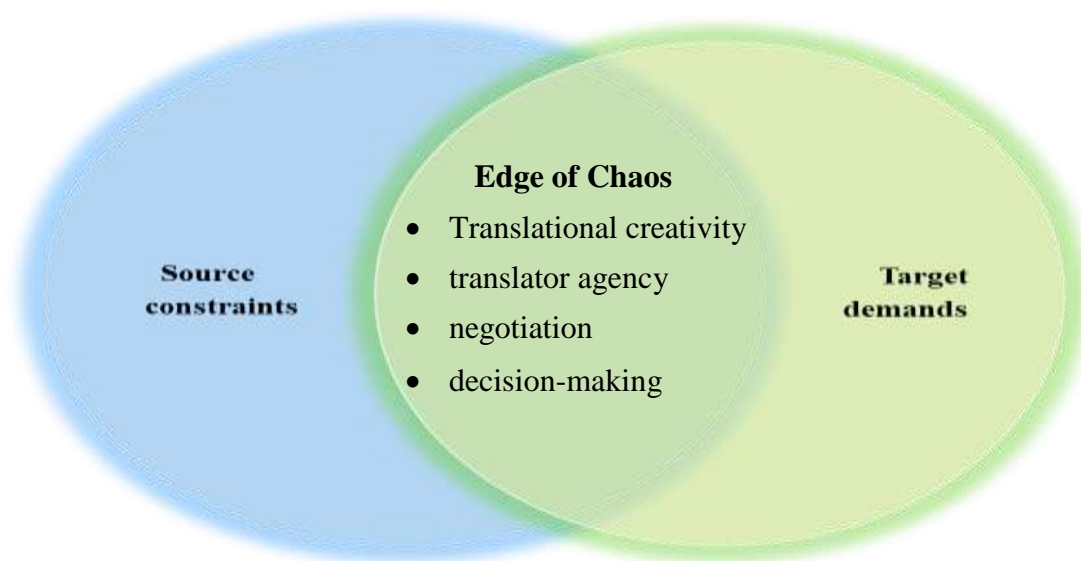


Figure 2. Edge of chaos (Translational creativity zone)

The proposed conceptual framework affirms that what are known as 'Turns' in translation studies do not represent exclusionary transformations in which the later cancels the earlier, but rather represent integrated interpretive dimensions that collectively contribute to building what can be called the 'Translation Complex', where translation is understood as a multifaceted phenomenon, historically changing, and open to its social and cognitive environment.

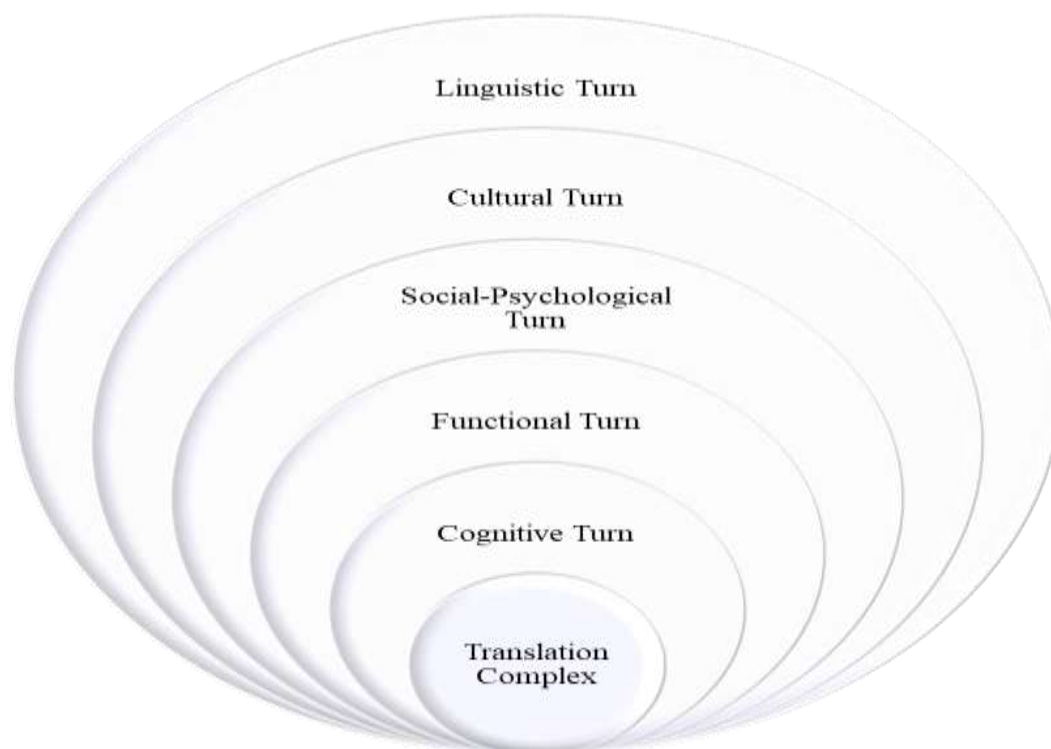


Figure 3. Translation complex (Inclusive conception of translation)

Thus, this conceptual framework provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding translation not only as a technical or linguistic act but also as a complex human, cognitive, and cultural reality, in which meanings are formed through interaction rather than transfer.

5.2 A Proposed Definition of Translation From a Complexity Perspective

Translation is a complex communicative process in which meanings emerge from the interaction of language with culture, context, and the text's function, non-linearly through the translator's creative negotiation of the reciprocal relationships and feedback between semantic incipient and subsequent systems.

This projected definition distinguishes itself by integrating the various dimensions of translation into a single conception, entirely consistent with the proposed conceptual framework. It is a theoretically developed, citable, inclusive, clear, and brief definition that does not sacrifice conceptual depth, making it a suitable introductory educational resource for university textbooks and courses.

6. Theoretical Implications

This study, by re-examining the evolution of the concept of translation in light of complexity thinking, demonstrates that many theoretical problems in translation studies stem not from a lack of approaches, but from their conceptual organization as separate turns. The proposed framework (Translation Complex) highlights several important theoretical implications that

contribute to a more comprehensive and coherent reorientation of thinking about translation:

1. This framework reconsiders linear conceptions of the translation process, which assume the transfer of meaning from an initial semantic system to a subsequent one in a closed causal sequence. From a complexity perspective, translation is understood as a nonlinear semantic formation process characterized by recurrence and reflexivity, in which subsequent meanings are not outcomes but rather contribute to the reshaping of earlier meanings within a continuous network of interaction and feedback. This undermines the simplistic procedural understanding of translation as a fixed series of stages.
2. Translation Complex model demonstrates the limitations of the reductionist approach prevalent in some translation studies, which sought to explain the phenomenon by referring to a single dominant element, such as equivalence, function, culture, or linguistic structure. In contrast, this framework emphasizes that these elements do not explain translation in isolation, but rather contribute to the emergence of meaning through their interaction within a complex adaptive system governed by contextual, institutional, and epistemological constraints. In this sense, inclusiveness is not understood as the sum of its parts, but as an emerging product of their interaction.
3. This perspective provides an important theoretical foundation for sociological studies of translation, as it allows for the understanding of the formation of meanings and social systems as consequences of ongoing translation processes, not merely as the results of linguistic transfer. From this perspective, translation can be studied as a central actor in the production of knowledge, the formation of identities, and the transformation of discourses, rather than simply as a neutral intermediary between them.
4. The proposed framework redefines the relationship between what are known as turns in translation studies. It no longer views them as successive stages where each subsequent phase negates the previous one, but rather as integrated interpretive dimensions coexisting within a single epistemological structure. Linguistic, cultural, functional, and social approaches are not excluded within the framework of complexity. Still, they are instead reintegrated into a comprehensive conception that explains their historical and epistemological interaction within what is termed the ‘translation complex’.

Therefore, adopting complexity thinking not only redefines translation but also necessitates a re-examination of the theoretical foundations of translation studies. This allows the development of analytical, educational, and research models that better align with the dynamic, evolving nature of translation practice in contemporary contexts.

7. Methodological Implications

Although this study adopts a conceptual approach to reconceptualizing translation from the perspective of complexity theory, the proposed framework opens up prospects for future empirical research that could use diverse methodological approaches to study the interaction of the components of the ‘translation complex’ in real-world translation contexts. Among these approaches are the following:

- a. Empirical case studies that analyze how translators negotiate linguistic, cultural, functional, and institutional constraints while performing translation tasks, helping to understand how meaning arises from the interaction of different contextual factors during the translation process.
- b. Corpus-based studies can be employed to examine patterns of variation and regularity in large collections of translated texts. By analyzing translation choices across different text types, fields, and socio-cultural contexts, this type of study can reveal systematic relationships between the elements that constitute the translational construct.
- c. Network-oriented approaches can contribute to a deeper understanding of the relational nature of translation systems, as they focus on analyzing interactions between translators, institutions, texts, and audiences, helping to clarify how translation works within broader cultural and communicative networks.
- d. Comparative studies across different translation domains, such as literary, legal, audiovisual, and AI-enhanced machine translation, can contribute to testing the explanatory power of the proposed framework. These studies help to understand how the components of the translation system function under diverse communicative conditions and technological environments.

These methodological approaches demonstrate how the conceptual framework proposed in this study can form the basis for future empirical research seeking to understand the complexity of translation as a multidimensional phenomenon.

8. Conclusion

This study sought to re-examine the concept of ‘translation’ by tracing its theoretical development and analyzing how its definitions were produced across different stages in translation studies. The analysis revealed that the richness of translation definitions, while important for broadening the field's scope, simultaneously fragmented the concept by treating translation as a series of separate turns, thereby preventing the development of an inclusive conception that reflects its complex nature. To tackle this problem, the study adopted complexity thinking as a theoretical framework for reconceptualizing translation as a complex reality and a dynamic, adaptive system in which linguistic, cultural, social, historical, functional, and cognitive elements interact in nonlinear relationships grounded in reciprocity, feedback, and semantic emergence. This perspective allowed moving beyond the reductionist understanding of translation as a mere transfer or transformation of meaning, replacing it with a conception that views translation as a process of meaning formation within a network of constraints, interactions, and changing contexts.

The study's findings indicate that translation turns should not be viewed as opposing trends or stages where the later phases negate the earlier ones, but rather as complementary dimensions that collectively contribute to building what can be termed the ‘translation complex’. This perspective enables understanding translation as a humanistic and cognitive practice that transcends traditional binary boundaries, operating at the ‘edge of chaos’ where creativity is

born, and meaning is reshaped. It renovates translation from traditional views to a complexity-based reconceptualization, as illustrated:

1. Traditional reductionism views the evolution of translation as separate ‘turns’ where each theoretical approach appears as a replacement for its prototype. While the complexity approach considers translation as a ‘complex system’ of knowledge within which theories and practices coexist and interact continuously without mutual cancellation.
2. Traditionally, translation is defined as the process of transferring a meaning from the source to the target, assuming the possibility of directly maintaining equivalence. But in translation emergence, meaning is not transferred; rather, it emerges from the interaction among the text, the translator, the context, and the technology, making it unpredictable.
3. Translation is traditionally seen as a ‘linear process’ that begins with understanding, then analysis, and finally production, in a fixed and closed sequence. But ‘non-linearity’ views translation as a recursive network, in which the translator constantly returns to previous stages for reinterpretation and selection.
4. The traditional concept of ‘source vs. target’ is based on a rigid dichotomy that separates the original text from the translated text, subordinating one to the other in a hierarchical relationship. But the ‘incipient-subsequent’ systems redefine the relationship as an interaction between two successive temporal systems, in which the earlier text is neither superseded nor dominated; rather, each system influences and reciprocates with the other.

This study thus contributes by constructing a comprehensive conceptual framework that reorganizes thinking about translation and proposes new approaches to its dynamic nature and its relationship to knowledge, culture, society, and technology. The proposed ‘translation complex’ framework provides an integrative view of existing theories and a conceptual basis for studying the dynamic interactions in the translation process. This framework is expected to support future studies, both theoretical and applied, and to contribute to the development of translation education and translator training, in line with the complexities of the linguistic and communicative landscape of the contemporary world.

9. Directions for Future Research

This study can serve as a foundation for future research that seeks to test the proposed conceptual framework and apply it empirically in different translation contexts. Furthermore, the scope of the research can be expanded by linking this framework to human, AI-enhanced machine, and hybrid translation approaches. This allows for a comparison of self-organization patterns within each system, an analysis of similarities and differences in translation decision-making, and an examination of the impact of technological factors on meaning production. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of translation in the context of rapid digital transformation.

In addition, this framework can be employed to study translation as a complex, open system characterized by non-linearity, adaptability, and emergence. This allows for a re-examination of traditional concepts such as equivalence, semantic constancy, and source text dominance.

These studies will contribute to developing an all-inclusive definition of translation, one that encompasses its various contemporary aspects and reflects its complex reality as a dynamic, multi-dimensional practice in the human-AI age.

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