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Intersemiotic translation

Another terminological problem within Translation Studies

1. Jakobson's fame and contributions to linguistics and translation studies

Roman Jakobson is a huge name in linguistics and literary theory. His studies and contributions focus on phonology, syntax, morphology and semantics. Jakobson worked with linguists of the stature of Trubetzkoy, he was influenced by Saussure and structuralism; Pierce and semiotics; and Karl Bühler and language functions. In turn, he influenced others, like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Dell Hymes and Noam Chomsky. Jakobson was a founding member of the Prague school of linguistics. He worked at Harvard University from 1942 until his retirement in 1967. One of his most recognized contributions is in phonology with his proposal of distinctive features, based on structuralism and universalism. Most brief accounts of his life and work do not mention his contribution to translation studies or theory, which seems to be limited almost exclusively to one short essay. Notwithstanding, he is one of the most quoted scholars in the field, as pointed out also by numerous scholars, e.g., Hongwei Jia [2017: 32]. What he tends to be quoted for is his triadic division of translation into three types, namely, intralinguistic, interlinguistic and intersemiotic.

A quick reread of Jakobson's 6-page essay [1957: 232-239] shows that there seems to be a clear discrepancy between his actual contribution—and purpose—and what many after him (e.g., Canepari 2022; da Silva 2017; Echauri 2019; O'Halloran *et al*. 2016; Pârlog 2019; Razumovskaya 2019; Zhang 2023) have wished to see in this essay on translation. It is this discrepancy that I aim to explore in this paper, and, hopefully, provide some insight as to why and how it came to be. Jakobson's fame and stature certainly seem to be a factor, along with overenthusiastic followers and disciples, imbuing Jakobson with boundless knowledge and infallibility. The dynamics of Jakobson and his followers is also symptomatic of placing translation-related studies under the umbrella of applied linguistics. There is an appeal to authority in much of the uncritical citations of Jakobson's "three types of translation" (e.g., Redazione Eurotrad 2022). It is not my intention to dismiss Jakobson's achievements. The purpose of this paper is to see and acknowledge the real dimension of his contribution and its relevance today, his legacy, and ways to move forward, in a world of global communication, mass media and the popularity of multimodality, along with technological developments and a vibrant landscape of professional and non-professional translating projects.

2. Jakobson's seminal article 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation'

2.1. Objectives

The main purpose of Jakobson's essay is to contribute to semantics. The translatability of words is used to show the universality of certain linguistic concepts surrounding the issue of lexical meaning in comparative linguistics. The opening paragraphs deal with meaning, specifically the meaning of the word *cheese*, in different languages.

The meaning of the words "cheese," "apple," "nectar," "acquaintance," "but," "mere," and of any word or phrase whatsoever is definitely a linguistic—or to be more precise and less narrow—a semiotic fact. Against those who assign meaning (signatum) not to the sign, but to the thing itself, the simplest and truest argument would be that nobody has ever smelled or tasted the meaning of "cheese" or of "apple." There is no signatum without signum [Jakobson 1957: 232].

Thus, translation and semiotics are introduced as part of the discussion of the meaning of words. Basically, semiotics is simply acknowledged as a broader framework than linguistics, and language, as a form of sign systems. However, there is no clarification, for example, as to whether Morse code, braille, or different alphabets and writing systems constitute different semiotic systems or whether all forms of written and spoken language must be considered within the system of language, to be dealt with in linguistics.

For us, both as linguists and as ordinary word users, the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign "in which it is more fully developed," as Peirce, the deepest inquirer into the essence of signs, insistently stated [Jakobson 1957: 232-233].

I find it revealing here that the self-reference "us" lacks any reference to translators. So, the objective of his essay is not to address the concerns of translators, but as explicitly stated, to refer to "translation" as a way of assigning meaning to a word. It is to this end that Jakobson states that there are "three kinds of translation to be differently labeled" as "three ways of interpreting a verbal sign". It is essential to remember the direct quote.

1. Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
2. Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
3. Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems [Jakobson 1957: 233].

Jakobson insists that the term "translation" be used and understood entirely and exclusively within the realm of semantics, as a tool to get to the meaning of words or code-units. Thinking again of "cheese", Jakobson says that in interlingual translation, there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units (because "cottage cheese" would not qualify as "cheese" if we were to use the Russian word for cheese). In short, there are, according to Jakobson, three ways to get to the meaning of a word by translation: by synonymy, by literal translation into a foreign language, or by means of a picture (graphic symbol) that illustrates the meaning of the word. Maybe he is not limiting his proposal to visual signs, but he does not elaborate on this type of translation, and only a bit more when he gets to creative transposition. In his essay, the notion of translation is akin to (an alternative way of) providing a definition to show the meaning of a word.

Interlinguistic translation is a reported speech. [...] Thus translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes. No linguistic specimen may be interpreted by the science of language without a translation of its signs into other signs of the same system or into signs of another system. Any comparison of two languages implies an examination of their mutual translatability; widespread practice of interlingual communication, particularly translating activities, must be kept under constant scrutiny by linguistic science [Jakobson 1957: 233-234].

Jakobson's objective, then, is to defend universality (words can be translated from one language to another) as opposed to linguistic relativism (translation is essentially impossible), so long as certain facts about language (different grammars) are observed. His objective is to deal with translation as establishing equivalence between languages and sign systems, while recognizing that full equivalence is often not possible. He calls for a need for better "bilingual dictionaries with careful comparative definitions" as well as bilingual grammars. For Jakobson, in his defence of universality,

No lack of grammatical device in the language translated into makes impossible a literal translation of the entire conceptual information contained in the original. (...) the cognitive level of language not only admits but directly requires recoding interpretation, i.e., translation. Any assumption of ineffable or untranslatable cognitive data would be a contradiction in terms [Jakobson 1957: 235].

One objective that Jakobson clearly does not have on his agenda is to try and explain the challenges posed by poetry within the field of translation:

In poetry above all, the grammatical categories carry a high semantic import. In these conditions, the question of translation becomes much more entangled and controversial [...]. In poetry, verbal equations become a constructive principle of the text. Syntactic and morphological categories [...] in short any constituents of the verbal code [...] carry their own autonomous signification [...]. Poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible: either intralingual transposition—from one poetic shape to another, or interlingual transposition—from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition—from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting." [Jakobson 1957: 236].

Going back to the three types of translation, Jakobson says quite clearly that they are three ways of gleaning meaning. Who would glean meaning?

Linguists? It is not reckless to infer that such a use of the word *translation* is not about it being a profession, a social practice, or an intellectual activity that might have agency or authorship (translators). Also, an important reminder to people who use the three types as some form of unquestionable typology, Jakobson himself immediately destroys this illusion by stating that only interlingual translation is *translation proper*. This is hardly a firm ground on which to claim that intersemiotic translation is a real thing in society and in the translating profession. The fact that many articles and books treat it as if it were (e.g., Zhang 2023) does not change (should not change) what Jakobson actually wrote and did not write about it. Jakobson says nothing about intralingual translators nor intersemiotic translators and what their job description might be, and he covers himself quite coherently by saying that only interlingual translation is *translation proper*, in all likelihood implying that he is thinking of translators as practitioners of interlingual translation, not anyone who draws a picture of a car to show the meaning of the word *car*.

Jakobson goes into great detail (e.g. *cheese*) when it comes to explaining comparative linguistics and comparative grammars between languages. This is in stark contrast to having a little to say about synonymy and next to nothing about how the equivalent meaning of *cheese* can be represented by an equivalent in music. The only examples he analyses of what might be intersemiotic translation (he does not make this clear) are the surprises that people from one culture get when they see graphic personifications (of the moon, or days of the week, or sin) from another culture in the "wrong gender" because both cultures ascribe the pictorial image (as a female or male character) of the moon, the sun, or sin in line with the grammatical gender (feminine or masculine) of the word *moon, sun* or *sin* in their language.

2.2 Misconceptions

My claim is that Jakobson's essay cannot be said to be about translation studies in any way like James Holmes' [1972] or Gideon Toury's [1995] contributions to the discipline, or scholars and translators who devoted many efforts and pages to the topic, like Octavio Paz [1971], Jorge Luis Borges [1926], Vladimir Nabokov [1941], Eugene Nida [1964], André Lefevere [1992], or Peter Newmark [1980], to name a few. For Holmes, there is a case to be made in favour of translation studies becoming a discipline in its own right at some stage. Jakobson has no such aspiration, being quite content to keep the status quo of linguistics, semiotics, communication

theory, and literary studies. This is understandable given that certain branches of linguistics were still in their early days. It seems like a misconception to believe that translation, as social practice (including variables such as motivation, censorship and publishing policies), was a core concern for Jakobson. This leads us to a more serious misconception of Jakobson having any claim as some sort of father figure to Translation Studies.

A second misconception is to imbue his triadic typology of translation with any staying power, or as a reflection of translating realities. Too often we read, "there are three types of translation" (e.g., Redazione Eurotrad 2022), either implying or stating it like that because Jakobson said so, or proved it empirically, or dealt with the issue at length and in detail. We can see from the quote that Jakobson all but discards any serious functionality of the classification before he has even finished presenting all three of the types. He pauses for a moment in number two, to state quite explicitly that only interlingual translation is *translation proper*. Where does that leave the other two types as *types proper*? One is tempted to say as strawmen or props for the mere purpose of framing interlingual translation as a useful tool for comparative linguistics and semantics, while acknowledging that synonymy and visual aids can also provide insight into meaning. It must be pointed out that, while Jakobson respects experimental studies and empiricism, his proposal of three types is not based on descriptive studies of a large corpus of published translations. His scientific experience is built squarely within linguistics, and his pursuit is a defence of universalism and universal principles of human communication. How does Jakobson resolve his lack of faith in intralingual or intersemiotic translation having any legs? He proposes the dimension of (creative) transposition, yielding intralingual transposition, interlingual transposition, and intersemiotic transposition from verbal art into music, dance, cinema or painting but stops there, at the stage of proposing these labels without giving them any substance or argument. He says he is worried about grammar but has nothing to say about the grammar of painting or the language of cinema. What he is saying is that because poetry is by definition untranslatable, so is intersemiotic translation (and many instances of intralingual and interlingual translation), and the best one can aspire to is creative transposition. The key word here is *creative*, used as it is in a derogatory sense from the point of view of full equivalence and the virtues of literal translation.

Hongwei Jia [2017] points out how throughout Jakobson's article there is no clear definition of either translation or sign, which are the necessary

conditions for talking about intersemiotic translation. I would argue that he does leave enough clues of what he wants *translation* to mean in his article, it is just that it is not how one would define translation if one wished to develop a theory of translation phenomena and practices and explain how translators work and what their conditions are. I should also point out that he does not provide a definition of *transposition* which is, one would assume, the necessary counterpart to *translation* whereby a clear demarcation has to be established to distinguish one from the other.

2.3. Contributions

Jakobson's contribution to translation scholars and teachers is undoubtable but it may not be exactly what many publications seem to advertise it as. His contribution, I would argue, is more inspirational than conceptual or theoretical, and certainly not practical in any meaningful way for translators. He does not develop a full explanation of the differences and possibilities of intralingual translation and intersemiotic translation. He just drops these names and moves on to talk about grammar and the relationship between signifier and signified, and how all languages can express all ideas, although languages differ in what they must express (e.g. gender or number) because of the idiosyncrasies of each language's grammar. It is precisely because he does not go into any detail and because he is a figure of authority that later scholars and theorists can resort to his name as a source of citations, his contribution has been to put out there a notion of *intersemiotic translation* that can then be moulded according to each scholar's understanding and purposes.

Let us take the case of audiovisual translation, which has for too long lived on the periphery of translation studies. One way to help bring it into the mainstream of the discipline would be to make a claim like Jakobson states that there are three types of translation, and so far, not enough attention has been paid to intersemiotic translation, which includes audiovisual translation. The same sort of statement could be made for other areas of interest within translation studies, like film adaptation, comic books, transmedia generally, and all forms of multimodality within translation. An example of this can be found in Zhang's [2023] book on audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation. While he admits that Jakobson leaves much to be done he also uses as his starting point the assumption that intersemiotic translation and intersemiotic translators exist. This is done by virtue of further developing the theory of *intersemiotic translation* himself and just

taking Jakobson's position on translation and translator as axiomatic. Zhang does this for the case study of Ang Lee's films, whereas Jia [2017] does it to contextualize and justify his theoretical alternative.

Another important contribution of Jakobson's is how he brings to the fore the debate on untranslatability and relates it to a linguistic dilemma expressed in terms of universalism (everything can be translated because thought precedes languages) versus relativism (the fact that language conditions thought makes translation sometimes nigh impossible).

Implicitly, Jakobson seems to support the idea that linguistics and semiotics and pragmatics cannot be complete without including issues raised by translatability, and how interpretation of meaning is affected by translation and how (literal) translation is affected by morphology, syntax and lexical distributions.

Translators and translation scholars can be thankful that Jakobson ever wrote a piece that included the word translation several times in it, given his international prestige. However, his actual contribution to translation studies is limited at best and would have been far less quoted had it been authored by anyone else.

3. Jakobson's (unfortunate?) legacy

I have already hinted at his legacy through the discussion on his contribution. Because his short piece has drawn so much attention from translation scholars it is also worth mentioning some of the implications of what he wrote given their influence, too.

Intralingual translation suggests that languages are monolithic, there is no warning about language variation (use and user variables) and the importance of discourse. The implication is that a synonym conveys the same semantic value, no need to ask whether there are important dialectal, chronolectal or sociolectal differences, or whether different discourses or styles favour one synonym over another. Nor is there any awareness of words borrowed from other languages and their implications. The important point for translation is whether to treat a borrowed or foreign word or passage as a distinct language, helping to conform a multilingual text (or one with significant language variation), or a feature of the source language's lexicon. Unless this is addressed the distinction between intralingual and interlingual is ill-defined. The linguistic challenges of establishing how different two dialects have to be to be considered different languages or what

other factors could contribute to dialects being regarded as languages is not touched upon but it is an essential ingredient of the intralinguistic/interlingusitic divide. Intralingual audio description or captioning is not discussed as to whether it should belong in this category or the intersemiotic one.

Subtitles can be classified as intralingual (captions) or interlingual. Although the terms clearly seem borrowed from Jakobson there is no evidence that the observation or the practice of these two types is in any way dependent on Jakobson's contribution. Intralingual subtitles are also referred to as same-language subtitles. Furthermore, same-language subtitles for the Deaf and hard of hearing are sometimes referred to as intersemiotic, as are same-language audio descriptions, as they transpose non-verbal audio or visual elements, respectively, into words. But Jakobson says nothing about a translation that can be intralingual and intersemiotic at the same time.

Interlingual translation, according to Jakobson, suggests mutual translatability thus denying the importance of directionality in translation, according to empirical translation studies. The challenges and competences (or computer programming) involved in translating from language A to language B are not the same as from language B to A. Further, Jakobson does not refer to language families or their cultural histories and relations, or any degree of overlap, interference or influence among languages, or whether one linguistic community shares a geographical or political space with the speakers of the other language. Jakobson hardly refers to translators or the objects they work with: texts. For Jakobson the people involved or addressed in his article are either linguists or native language speakers; translators are nowhere mentioned. Nor is the textual dimension of translation. In his essay, translation is an operation that happens in comparative linguistics between words and languages, not in society, and certainly not as an industry as it is perceived today, and not from one text to another (with all the complexities of textual communication). The importance of this omission cannot be underestimated, for many reasons. One reason is that texts are not necessarily limited to a single language, or dialect or style, or discourse, or voice; another relevant one for the purpose of this paper is that texts may also be, as they increasingly are, multimodal. Thirdly, texts are purpose driven, and the intentionality of a text and of its translation is a key factor, including the observation that their motivations, intentions and functions may differ. However, for many of Jakobson's followers, translation involves an operation of establishing equivalence between a message (not a text) in one (single) language and the message of another (single)

language, the message is presumed to have a single denotative meaning (like weather reports). Given that texts are defined as communication acts involving text producers and users, context colours meaning as well as the signifier and the signified, but although pragmatics is mentioned it is not elaborated upon as an important feature of translation in Jakobson's essay. Finally, texts can, and increasingly are, multimodal, something we could easily call semiotically complex. Textual elements such as punctuation in writing or intonation and loudness in speech can also carry or influence meaning.

Intersemiotic translation is hinted at in Jakobson's essay as an operation to interpret the meaning of a word or words by means of a pictograph. A duality is created between what is either verbal or non-verbal, leaving out the essential ingredient of the paraverbal dimension of any text. Once there is a text and a context, it follows that there must be interlocutors, with their own limitations and motivations and biases that all help to provide meaning, but words cannot be communicated without becoming material in some way, namely as sounds or graphemes, and decisions often have to be made about the exact material nature of these sounds (loudness, speed, voice quality, intonation, etc.) and verbal images (calligraphy, typography, layout, colour schemes, design, paper, ink, screen, etc.). Paraverbal elements are often also subject to interpretation along with the verbal elements they carry. For these reasons and others, such as the fact that shapes and colours can be considered non-verbal but also paraverbal, the borderline between interlingual and intersemiotic is ill-defined. Moreover, given that Jakobson explicitly states that intersemiotic translation only includes the non-verbal representation of the meaning of verbal signs, the implication is that he is only preoccupied with language understood as verbally expressed meaning, not vice versa or any combination of multimodality or between two different non-verbal sign systems. So, when later on, scholars include audiovisual translation (for example) within intersemiotic translation they are reading something into Jakobson's words that is not there. They may be inspired by his words but they are not being faithful to (or critical of) what he proposed.

Jakobson's approach to translation, based on universalism and interlingual translation proper, aligns very well with the defenders of literal translation of written prose as in sacred texts, scientific and instructional writing, and philosophy, only when written in a single style of language and discourse, conforming to grammar. In this sense, the development of theoretical and academic research into many other forms of translation

is pulled back (e.g., multimodal and multilingual texts, and wordplay), especially given Jakobson's unequivocal claim that poetry is by definition untranslatable and that creative intersemiotic transposition (rather than translation) is a better way of labeling what goes on from verbal art into cinema. And because Jakobson mentions the pun as a main culprit of poetry being excluded from any consideration about translation we might also assume that humor and many rhetorical features that may be used to highlight or modify meaning are also excluded, like irony, metaphorical expressions, symbolism, sarcasm, innuendo, so-called between the lines, rhyme, alliteration, hyperbaton, repetition, palindrome, spoonerism, intertextuality, and allusion.

4. On semiotics and multimodality in translation

Just as Jakobson is vague, to say the least, in his use of the word *translation*, so too is his use of *semiotic* if we are to get to the bottom of what *intersemiotic translation* could look like. Semiotics is said to be the study of signs, and signs are anything that produces meaning, verbal or otherwise, or can be interpreted as unintentional communication of one's feelings. In a model that proposes intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic as types, especially one not particularly based on empiricism, one is left wondering why there can't be an *intrasemiotic* category (as mentioned in Kaźmierczak 2018). This category could refer to real-life translation practices of multimodal or semiotically complex texts, like the translation of audiovisual (multimodal) texts, as they typically combine various sign systems [Chaume 2018]. On the verbal plane intrasemiotic translation would cover intralinguistic and interlinguistic translation given that they supposedly keep within the boundaries of verbally expressed language, disregarding paraverbal meaning-making for the moment. Then, intrasemiotic could also cover the many paintings that are one artist's interpretation, or reinterpretation, of another artist's painting, as would be the case of Picasso's Meninas based on Velazquez's. The term *intrasemiotic* is proposed here in keeping with Jakobson's distinction of intra- vs. inter-, though I would also suggest the usefulness of referring to *isosemiotic* [Gottlieb 2005] as possibly more felicitous term for cases like dubbing and subtitling where both the source text and its translation are both ultimately audiovisual.

Multimodality refers to the interplay between different representational modes, for instance, between images and words. Audiovisual translation

involves the translation of audiovisual texts. Audiovisual texts are typically multimodal, combining as they do, spoken and written words with music, other sound effects and all sorts of images (as well as the writing). So, can the translation of an audiovisual text, through dubbing, subtitling, or remakes, etc. be called intersemiotic? There are a few reasons that would support answering no to this question. One is that it does not fit Jakobson's definition, limited as it is to going solely in one direction, from words to pictographs. But even if we were to stretch and extend the scope of the original proposal to include from one sign system to another whatever they are and in any combination, we would still be left with a second reservation. The film (i.e., audiovisual text) as a semiotically complex multimodal form of communication is still a film once it has been translated, so it is difficult to argue that there has been a change from one sign system to another. The only way this could be possible would be by further interfering with Jakobson's words and original intention. In subtitling, for example, we might wish to say that the original audio verbal expressions have been intersemiotically translated as onscreen writing which is a different sign system. It may or may not be the case that writing and speaking can be considered different sign systems but that is certainly not what Jakobson meant at all.

On the other hand, many people talk of the language of cinema or film. The language of film is understood to include and combine (multimodally) all kinds of signs: verbal, photographic, cinematic, musical, kinesics, performance, and casting, to mention the most obvious ones. From this point of view, film is viewed, holistically, as its own sign system, with or without spoken words, with or without onscreen writing, with or without music or sound effects, multicoloured or monochrome in shades of grey, for example. This appeals to a lot of people, because accepting the language of film as a single, albeit complex, sign system enables us to explore the different grammars and cultures and histories of film, depending on their geographical and historical origins and evolution. For some authors, films are polysemiotic because they combine different sign systems, and that position can be defended, too. But whether a film is semiotically complex or polysemiotic, its translation is going to be equally polysemiotic or semiotically complex, so there is no case here for speaking of intersemiotic translation.

The other scenarios where the notion of intersemiotic translation is often defended are usually covered by the term *adaptation,* as in adapting a novel into a film, or a film into a TV series. This example is closer to what Jakobson had envisaged but the question remains as to what added value

intersemiotic translation brings to the table that film adaptation does not already cover. In fact, an author like Patrick Cattrysse [1992], much more focused on films and on translation than Jakobson, makes a compelling case for regarding the adaptation of a book into a film as a form of translation. Not intersemiotic translation or transposition, just translation. This case is of core importance to the definition of translation because it understands translation in much broader terms. Cattrysse's paper proposes an application of certain theories, known as the polysystem theories of translation, to the study of film adaptation. A preliminary and experimental analysis of a series of film adaptations made in the American film noir of the 1940s and 1950s shows that this approach provides the basis for a systematic and coherent method with theoretical foundations, and that it permits the study of aspects of film adaptation which have been neglected or ignored so far. Jakobson's starting point is verbal expression in different languages and how they can produce the same or similar meanings. Cattrysse's starting point is the observation of how translations are produced and received in different societies and communicative settings.

The big question that Jakobson does not answer is when and how do we know we are crossing over from one sign system to another? Are traffic signals a sign system all taken together or are traffic lights one set of signs and painted signs on the road a different one? Are different alphabets different sign systems such that English to Russian would be intersemiotic but not English to Italian? What about braille or Morse code, which are fundamentally alternative ways of communicating letters and words? And this would extend to sign language, of course, which is also verbally expressed language.

Another aspect is the range of relations between images and words and idioms. Cinema and television, especially in cartoons or films with special effects, can present the visual image of an idiom pertaining to a certain language in its literal meaning (freeze, toy (verb), unravel, rain cats and dogs, etc.) while prompting the viewer to associate it also to its verbally expressed idiomatic, non-literal meaning. This means that these images are not, strictly speaking, non-verbal. This extends to culturally-bound visual metaphors (e.g., an apple as a symbol of sin in Christianity). A third case are visual puns or expressions that combine words and images in a complementary way. An example of this is a character ordering another character to *get the door* (expecting him to answer the door and see who is knocking) and the other character comes back holding the door unhinged (having interpreted

fetch the door). A further case includes body language and gestures which are not verbal and may or may not be associated to what is being said, but they are often not universal either and can be more adequately decoded by people familiar with a given language or culture.

5. The need to update Jakobson's insights and the benefits of doing so

What I have hoped to show so far is that there is little to gain by misrepresenting Jakobson's words or his contribution to translation studies. Jakobson's category of *intersemiotic translation* was revitalised only after research into audiovisual translation and transmedia, and multimodality, and multilingualism in fictional texts took off (e.g., Chaume 2018). But there is no cause and effect, these studies did not take off driven by Jakobson's categories (e.g., intralingual vs interlingual subtitles) but because the sheer volume of audiovisual production and audiovisual translation eventually made it impossible to ignore these practices. The proof of this can be found in that fact that the pioneers (e.g., Cary 1960; Cattrysse 1992; Rowe 1960; Vöge 1977) do not mention Jakobson in their studies. Rowe, for example, only one year after Jakobson's essay, starts his article with the definition of dubbing, the situation of the professionals in the fields of dubbing and subtitling, and the tasks involved in working with texts and audiovisual material. Rowe compares literary translation with audiovisual translation, explaining the characteristics of both discourses. He also considers the importance of the audience in this work, comparing the audiences from the US and the UK. Furthermore, he makes a compilation of the different techniques used in several countries such as France, Italy, and Cambodia. Rowe presents the differences between dubbing and subtitling and the complexities and problems of both techniques, trying to meet quality standards, and helping the explanation with some examples, such as how to treat the problem of regional accents, the slang and popular expressions, the adaptation of humor, etc.

Alternatives to *intersemiotic translation* include terms like transmedia, which are already well-established, plus potentially more felicitous theoretical terms such as the ones proposed here: *isosemiotic* translation and *semiotically complex* texts. *Isosemiotic*, for translations that by and large combine the same semiotic code systems as their corresponding source texts, typically including any form of audiovisual translation, with the possible

exception of accessible versions for the blind or the deaf, assuming a need to express inaccessible visuals or acoustic signs through a different mode of expression. *Semiotically complex*, to raise awareness that some texts can use a single system of codes or signs (e.g., nonverbal assembly instructions for furniture, mathematical notation for arithmetic, verbally expressed traffic signs, stock market tickers, nonverbal signs at airports for toilets and other places), whereas others may combine many different forms. In this respect the language of film stands out as particularly *semiotically complex* given that it can use photography, dance, body language, facial expressions, camera shots and angles, spoken language, written language, multilingualism, mime, sign language, music, sound effects, to mention only the most obvious ones, plus all the different ways in which they can be combined.

Given the popularity of Jakobson's proposal, and probably also the misconceptions surrounding it, each scholar has chosen to provide a notion of *intersemiotic translation* to whatever they happened to be studying at the moment. This dynamic seems to give the impression that for the average scholar it is easier, and better, to say that they are on Jakobson's side and applying his model rather than risk putting forward the idea that one is questioning the applicability of Jakobson's model even if it is only out of respect for its author. The accumulated effect of many publications in this vein may achieve the contrary result, i.e., to make Jakobson's insight look wrong and misguided, as well as too ambitious.

The way to respect Jakobson's memory and make the best possible use of his contribution to translation studies is to remain alert and critical and define his scope as accurately as possible. No scholar is above criticism, and all benefit from constant updating, and Jakobson should be no exception. When discourse studies were developed and applied to translation (e.g. Hatim, Mason 1990) they highlighted a further possible meaning for semiotics that also questions the validity of Jakobson's three types: the observation that words and phrases, as discourse, can take on a social semiotic dimension. An example of this would be something like *ich bin ein Berliner*, which not only means something in German but can also be said to have a semiotic dimension even as verbal units, operating as an echo with a powerful rippling effect of John F Kennedy's famous 1963 words. Thus, they argue in favor of the communicative, pragmatic and semiotic dimensions of verbal discourse.

It must be stated that Jakobson did not work within Translation Studies and did not contribute to Translation Theory; rather, he mentioned the

mutual translatability of words and phrases as part of his contribution to linguistics. This is particularly true of Jakobson's proposal of the label *intersemiotic translation,* when he himself also proposes *creative transposition* as a better way of labeling poetry and film translation. The initial confusion comes from (at least) two different meanings attached to the word *translation*. One is the establishment of the same or equivalent semantic meaning for different signs (linguistic or otherwise), the other refers to certain social and publishing practices presented to the public as translations, done by translators (what Toury calls assumed translations). To talk of translatability is problematic while this ambiguity is maintained because we cannot be sure if one is referring to the (im)possibility of finding equivalences between or among languages (or code systems), or, on the other hand, social, financial, political, cultural conditions that promote or stifle translation activities, especially publication and awareness and appreciation for translations.

From the latter interpretation it is also important to recognise what is at stake by including or excluding communication or artistic practices that might be included in the umbrella term *translation*: localisation, transcreation, transmedia, cultural mediation, adaptation, and so on. Furthermore, the instability of the very concept of translation means that it is still up for debate whether practices like poetry translation or humour translation or certain modes of audiovisual translation are even accepted as translation; they certainly are not in Jakobson's essay, who provides a throwaway basket called transposition for practices that endeavour to account for factors such as double meaning, metalinguistic features, allusion, aesthetic quality and cultural elements. The final note is to show the contrast between focusing entirely on the cognitive dimension of verbal expression and meaning and two other dimensions which are traditionally left out: (i) the sensorial experience of the material dimension of signs and sign systems, and (ii) the entertainment factor. Linguistics focused on the verbal dimension of communication sometimes forgets that in order to concentrate on abstract units like words, morphemes and phonemes, first they have to be separated from the environments in which they naturally occur, like recitals, screen and stage performances, the workplace, small talk, love letters, social media, text messages, rescue operations, posters, artwork and design in digital and printed material, etc. The fact is that translators must be interested in each and every feature of text production, distribution and reception because translators work with texts, as input and as their output. We must not forget that all paraverbal and other material elements of sound and image (and

other senses, like feel) are usually essential parts of a sensorial experience, of entertainment (or some form of engagement) along with meaning, of course.

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Abstract

This paper discusses a perceived discrepancy between a widespread acceptance of Roman Jakobson's [1957] ideas and proposals for *intersemiotic translation* as part of his triadic division of three types of translation, on the one hand, and what he actually wrote, on the other, including his stated aims, approach and contributions. In this paper, I argue that Jakobson aims to make a contribution within (lexical) semantics, rather than lay the foundations for translation studies or have an impact on translation practices, like James Holmes [1988] or Peter Newmark [1980], respectively. Once the discrepancy has been established, the point is to use terms like *intersemiotic translation,* as coherently as possible along with other related terms, such as same-language subtitling, transmedia, multimodality, audiovisual translation, and adaptation, and leaning on empirical studies of translational phenomena. An important dilemma resides in the ambiguity of the term "translation", for example, if it is used, like Jakobson, to refer to the mutual translatability of words and signs, or if it used to refer to sociocultural, professional and textual practices, as understood by authors like Lefevere [1992]. Another necessary distinction is one of words as abstract semantic entities or the condition that they must be "performed" in context, with all the necessary paralinguistic factors.

Keywords: Intersemiotic translation, multimodality, isosemiotic, translatability, discourse.