

# Theories of Translation

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Discussions about theories of translation are too often concerned with distinctions between literary and nonliterary texts, between prose and poetry, or between technical articles on physics and run-of-the-mill commercial correspondence. But in order to understand the nature of translation, the focus should not be on different types of discourse but on the processes and procedures involved in any and all kinds of interlingual communication (Bell, 1987). Furthermore, a theory of interlingual communication should not be restricted to discussions between translating and interpreting (whether consecutive or simultaneous), since interpreting differs from translating primarily because of the pressures of time and exigencies of the setting.

Some professional translators take considerable pride in denying that they have any theory of translation — they just translate. In reality, however, all persons engaged in the complex task of translating possess some type of underlying or covert theory, even though it may be still very embryonic and described only as just being "faithful to what the author was trying to say."

Instead of no theories of translation, there are a multiplicity of such theories, even though they are seldomly stated in terms of a full-blown theory of why, when, and how to translate. One of the reasons for so many different views about translating is that interlingual communication has been going on since the dawn of human history. As early as the third millennium BC, bilingual lists of words — evidently for the use of translators — were being made in Mesopotamia, and today translating and interpreting are going on in