Naturalization as a Core Principle of Translation

Franca Daniele
Department of Medical, Oral and Biotechnological Sciences
"G. d'Annunzio" University, Chieti-Pescara, Italy
Editor-in-Chief

Naturalness is a dilemma in translation and translation procedures often reach high levels of accuracy and adequacy yet, many of them still fail to sound fully natural in the target language. Even when correctness and comprehensibility appear to be achieved, the translated text frequently lacks the *definitive* character and communicative force of authentic target language discourse. This issue is closely tied to the controversial concept of naturalness, which is problematic because translation always occurs between two culturally different systems. Source languages contain culture-specific items, conceptual structures, and communicative habits that do not easily *fit* into the target language. As a result, not only must the translated sentence be correct but must also *fit* into the communicative environment of the target language. Several scholars have addressed this issue. Newmark (1991) argues that translation must reach a level of *natural language*, warning that *unnatural translations* are due to interference from the source language. Rogers (1998) emphasizes that naturalness must always be appropriate to the target text type and its communicative purpose, linking naturalness to *domestication* and audience expectations. Putranti (2018) notes that naturalness is difficult to achieve because languages express the same ideas in two different languages and proposes *modulation*, a technique that changes the point of view to maintain naturalness. However, simply *changing the point of view* does not guarantee naturalness. Excessive domestication may produce a fluent text that becomes *invisible*, losing the communicative traits of the source language (Venuti, 1995, 2008). Therefore, naturalness cannot be treated as an absolute or universal quality. Instead, it is a relative concept, shaped by multiple interacting linguistic and cultural factors. As I previously stated, "there is no universal naturalness" (Daniele, 2021). To address this complexity, the present Editorial reviews a new concept: *naturalization*.

In previous papers, I propose *naturalization* as a more precise and dynamic concept than naturalness (Daniele, 2021; Daniele, 2024). Unlike naturalness, which is often vague and subjective, *naturalization* emphasizes the process of intertwinement of two systems. The term *naturalization* comes from different fields: in law, it refers to a foreign citizen becoming part of a new country; in biology, it describes a species adapting to a new environment; in linguistics, it means adapting a foreign word to the phonology or spelling of a language. In all

these definitions, two systems are involved: an adopting system and an adapting element. Applied to translation, *naturalization* describes how the source language (SL) adapts to integrate into the target language (TL), while the target language also changes to adopt it. Translation is therefore not a one-way movement, but a reciprocal and dynamic process. *Naturalization* indicates the degree to which the source language becomes embedded in the target language. It expresses how much the target language *adopts* the source language and how successfully the communicative traits of the source language are preserved within the target language. At the same time, the source language must *adapt* to fit into the target language. This approach redefines *translation as a two-way interaction*. The source language is carried into the target language, adapting to it, but the target language is also transformed by the encounter with the source language. Meaning remains stable, but linguistic forms are reshaped to fit the new system.

In my *naturalization model* of translation, the process does not simply move the source language into the target language but, at first, it produces a new hybrid system called *source-targeted language*. This *source-targeted language* (STL) is not a mixture of two imperfect systems but a functional structure that preserves meaning while reshaping form. The key principle is that meaning remains constant, form changes. All changes occur at the surface level (lexicon, syntax, grammar, punctuation), while the deep structure—the communicative core—remains the same. When translation is fully naturalized, it contains all the semantic, structural, and functional characteristics of the source language but expressed through the resources of the target language. This process is reversible: once *naturalization* is complete, the target language can flow back into the source language.

This reversibility confirms that meaning has not been altered, only re-expressed. In my previous works, I stress that transformation does not imply distortion and differences between source language and target language are unavoidable and only formal (Daniele, 2021; Daniele, 2024). A message may appear different in multiple languages yet, still conveys exactly the same meaning. The greater the language resources, the greater the number of valid linguistic reformulations.

I identify three pillars that structure a high-quality translation: *accuracy, adequacy, and naturalization.*

SL   STL   TL

(1) Accuracy phase

(2) Adequacy phase

(3) Naturalization phase
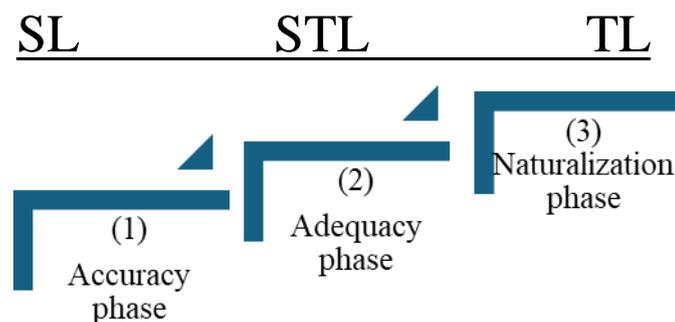
Each corresponds to a specific phase of the translation process. *Accuracy* is achieved through *word-for-word* translation, grammatical and syntactic reorganization, and correct punctuation. This stage ensures that the translation is linguistically correct in the target language. However, correctness alone does not guarantee that meaning has been transferred correctly. *Adequacy* is the state of being sufficient for the purpose concerned, so being a relation between means and purpose. It is thereby semantic- and process-oriented and at this second stage, the translator moves from word-for-word to *sense-for-sense* translation. Multiple rewritings may be necessary to select the most appropriate words and structures that preserve the meaning and cultural implications of the source language. *Adequate* translations transfer meaning, are culturally appropriate, and contextually acceptable. This corresponds to Toury's (1995) concept of *acceptability* and Newmark's (2009) notion of *closeness*. Even after *accuracy* and *adequacy* are achieved, the text may still sound foreign. The final step, *naturalization*, requires one more rewriting. This third stage does not focus on grammar or meaning, but on communicative authenticity. A naturalized translation sounds native to target language readers, fits the discourse norms of the target language, and communicates naturally within its cultural context. *Naturalization* embeds the translation fully into the target language while preserving the semantic and communicative traits of the source language. Its defining feature is reversibility (Daniele, 2021; Daniele, 2024). Naturalness alone cannot fully explain the complexity of translation. The concept of *naturalization* offers a more comprehensive model by highlighting translation as a *dynamic, two-way, adaptive/adoptive process.* Through *accuracy*, *adequacy*, and *naturalization*, translation becomes not a mechanical transfer of words, but a living interaction between languages and cultures. *Naturalization* demonstrates that translation is not about replacing one language with another, but about creating a new communicative space where meaning remains intact while form evolves.

References

1. Daniele, F. (2021) "Quality Translation and Translation Quality", *Traduttologia*, vol. 12 (23–24), pp. 95–114.

2. Daniele, F. (2024). "From Translation to Naturalization, from Translanguaging to Lingua Universalis". *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 11(2), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.19044/llc.v11no2a1

3. Newmark, P. (1991) About Translation. Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

4. Newmark, P. (2009) *The linguistic and communicative stages in translation theory*, books.google.com.

5. Putranti, A. (2018) "Modulation: A Translation Method to Obtain Naturalness in Target Language Texts", *Journal of Language and Literature,* vol. 18, No 1.

6. Rogers, M. (1998) *Naturalness and translation*, openaccess.nhh.no.

7. Toury, G. (1995) "The nature and role of norms in translation", *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*, John Benjamins Amsterdam.

8. Venuti, L. (1995, 2008) *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London and New York, Routledge.