

Issues in Bilingual and Multilingual Translation

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Abstract

Our paper investigates some issues in bilingual and multilingual translation. In 1978, Toury wrote that translation “involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions” (p. 200). Our paper mainly pertains to how translators are continuously faced with the problem of both explicit and implicit cultural aspects in the source text and how to successfully convey them in the target language. Our research question is “what are the implications of cultural aspects for translation?” The answer will come as a result of an analysis of cultural approaches (Snell-Hornby, 1990) and culture role in translation (Bassnett & Lefevre, 1990).

1. Introduction

Globalization initiated new paradigms and phenomena which led to the divergence and convergence of some aspects that propel people to form new boundaries, introduce new ideologies, homogenize cultures and use global language (Pieterse, 2004). Scholars' interest is in intercultural competence and in how people understand each other in order to avoid cross-cultural conflicts which come as a result of misinterpretation and misunderstanding of cultural features (Avruch, 1998). There is no doubt that translation plays a great role in the era of globalization. Indeed, it helps not only cross understanding through different texts written in different languages containing different cultures, but also

comprehending the people as users of these languages and cultures. Consequently, due to the importance of intercultural understanding, the translator is not only supposed to master the linguistic system and the rules that govern the language. He has also to be aware of the cultural aspects of the language and take them into account. Culture idiosyncrasies like proverbs and idioms impose on the translator a degree of intercultural awareness to preserve his translation from bias. Through intercultural awareness, the translator can decode and re-code his text with authenticity and credibility vis-à-vis the target culture. This presupposes an almost perfect knowledge of the culture of the other. If words are powerful, the culture they embody is more powerful. This is what leads us to ask the following questions:

- What is culture?
- What is its relationship with translation?
- What is the cultural approach to translation studies?
- How could culture influence translation?
- How could intercultural awareness ameliorate the process of translation?
- What is the role of culture in translations?
- What are the main cultural implications for translation?

2. What is culture?

Culture is an intriguing concept and polymorphous term. It has been defined differently by different researchers. For instance, Harris (1993), states that culture “refers to the learned, socially acquired traditions that appear in rudimentary form among mammals, especially primates”(p.104).Whereas, Samovar & Stefani (2000), view culture as ”a deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meaning, hierarchies, religion, notion of time, role, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people” (p.36). In 2004, Rose proposes a condense definition

of culture. She claims that culture encompasses all the shared beliefs, practices and history. The compromise definition that could be structured from the aforementioned is that culture is a way of life. It comprises different elements that can be demonstrated by all the perspectives, products and practices of a community.

3. Culture and Language

Language is one of the most important means of communication. It represents a complex system of linguistic sounds and symbols (Samavour& Stefani, 2000). It is the key component of culture. Thus culture could never exist and survive without language. Similarly, each language echoes its culture (Kramsh, 1998). Language can reflect the characteristics of its culture like economy, politics and religion. Moreover, Bassnett (2004), makes an analogy between language and heart. He proposes that "language is the heart within the body culture and their interaction results in the continuation of life-energy"(p.22).Consequently, language and culture are tightly interwoven. The one influences and empowers the other. It is very unlikely that one would exist without the other, for both play an undeniable role in the life of a given group of people.

4. Culture and Translation

Translation was and still represents one of the effective tools that provide understanding in a multilingual and cross- cultural exchange. As defined by Munday (2001), translation is the interpretation of signs by means of some other signs. Thus the process of translation requires the knowledge and the mastery of two languages at least (Toury,1978). Since language is bound to its culture, then intercultural and cultural awareness could be indispensable competences in the process of translation. Hornby (1998) maintains that translation can no

longer be attributed only to languages but also to different cultures. Qiyi (2000) agrees that the cultural aspects that embody the language form the pillars of translation. Accordingly, we can deduce that translation requires a proficiency in both language and its culture. The translator must pay attention to cultural aspects, otherwise a disequilibrium in his translated text would be the result. To guarantee the credibility and the authenticity of the translation process, the translator has to develop his cultural and intercultural awareness.

5. Approaches to Translation

Translation studies have been highlighted in different perspectives and by various approaches. Also, they shifted from one stage to another in a variety of trends. Consequently, large amount of research was conducted to inquire into translation methods, procedures and issues (Yan & Huang, 2014).

The starting point of translation studies was the linguistic approach through the use of word-to-word method of translation. By 1964, Nida, one of the pioneers of the linguistic approach, introduces his book "Towards science of translation" in which he emphasizes the transformational generative grammar. Nida (1964) suggests that all sentences have their essential and specific meaning. He tends to move from literal translation to free translation. He tries to provide both native and foreign readers with the same understanding through what he names dynamic equivalence.

Unlike the linguistic approach, the functionalist approach concentrates on the purpose and function of translation. Social situations and cultural aspects were gradually integrated in translation studies.

In the 1990's, translation stepped towards a more theoretical and methodological frame work. It shifted from linguistic to cultural approach. As an opposite view to word-to-word translation, Bassnet and Lefevere (1990), state that translation is contextual, reserved to a specific community with specific historical events and exclusive cultural products. Hence, it is very difficult to be explained only through linguistic signs and symbols that correspond between languages or to be related to sole universal standards (Bassnet&Lefevere, 1990).

From a cultural perspective, translation means re-writing which permits readers from various cultural backgrounds to conceptualize and draw representations of the original text. According, to Lefevere (1985), translation is broader than linguistic analysis. It aims at studying cultural elements and how words and concepts are manipulated to empower the culture. Polysystem theory can clearly represent the cultural approach. It emphasizes the role of the cultural environment whilst deciding which method to use to translate the text.

6. Intercultural Awareness

To fit the requirements of intercultural communication, many researchers like Byram (1997), Fantini (2000) and Deardorff (2006) introduce and emphasize the role of intercultural and cultural awareness. These types of awareness are basic equipments to avoid cross-cultural conflict and misunderstanding. According to Rose(2004), intercultural awareness means to become more aware of one's own culture and others' cultures. It is the ability to identify similarities and differences between cultures. Furthermore, intercultural awareness means being conscious of how culture could shape one's perceptions (Byram,1997; Kramsh1998). Also, it is the ability to understand how the individual is perceived by people of other cultures(Fantini,2000). Thus, intercultural awareness

permits the translator to be an intercultural mediator who is able to manage his stereotypes and tolerate cultural differences.

The literature in the field can provide the translator with a variety of models that enable him to inquire into the main levels of intercultural awareness. Bennett (1993), for instance, proposed a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity through which he explained how the individual could move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism and from denial of difference to acceptance and toleration. Bennett (1993) displayed the different levels each individual passes through during his exposure to a foreign culture.

Chen and Starosta (1998) suggested three levels of intercultural awareness: awareness of superficial cultural traits (stereotypes, preconceptions), awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits (constructing awareness through conflict and through analysis) and being able to see the world through the eye of the insider.

Also, Byram (1997) explained how a foreign learner moves towards critical cultural awareness through his model of cultural communicative competence. At the beginning, the individual will discover and examine his stereotypes, prejudices and beliefs (Byram and Guilhelme, 2000). Later on, the individual will be able to defend his beliefs with rationality and rigorous reasoning. He will achieve a deeper understanding of the foreign culture (Byram 1997). Finally, the individual will be able to communicate and to negotiate his own beliefs effectively and appropriately with intercultural individuals.

Intercultural awareness is a vital competence for the translator. It helps him to translate effectively using appropriate words without neglecting the cultural aspects.

Translation can be considered one of the most efficient mediums and channels that describe how other people think and

live. To warrantee credibility and the holiness of the translated text, the translator should be efficient and qualified. He has to raise his intercultural awareness to gain more insights into his culture and the target culture in order to provide his readers and receptors with a genuine translated text which maintains the original cultural values.

7. The role of Culture in Translation

For centuries, the relationship between language, translation and culture has been discussed at length by linguists, social scientists and philosophers of language. The earliest discussion dates back to Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which includes various versions and forms that all state a common idea “language is crucially culture-bound”. The strong version of this hypothesis states that nothing like real equivalence is possible in translation(Bascom, 2010).Among academics, only a limited agreement was provided to the idea of the strong version, until Bassnett and Lefevere in 1999 put forward cultural approach in translation studies. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) attached great importance to the role of culture in translation, the social background, the influence that cultural tradition imposed on translation, the subjectivity of translators and researching shift from linguistics to culture. This study has puzzled the field of translation. Most researchers in translation have shifted from linguistic-centered to culture-centered.

Moreover, the intimate relationship between language and culture was clearly demonstrated. Vermeer (1989) claims that “language is art of a culture” (p. 222). Additionally, Lotman (1978) argues that “no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language” (p. 211). For instance, in everyday life, people produce expressions related to culture. These expressions are faces of culture. For this reason our thoughts, believes and expressions are restricted

by our culture. Wittgenstein (1958) displays this restriction by stating that “the limits of my language are the limits of my world” (p. 53).

Katan (1999) distinguishes the parts of culture that are visible such as: customs, behaviours and artifacts from those which are hidden from view such as: values, norms and beliefs. According to him, the hidden parts of culture motivate continuously the visible ones. These cultural aspects are granted by members of a society.

Consequently, language and culture are found to be closely related and both aspects must be considered in translation. Furthermore, Katan (1999) claims:

“There are two points to be made here. First how languages convey meaning is related to the culture. Secondly, though languages can convey concepts from other cultures, people (including translators and interpreters) tend not to realize that their perception (through language) is, in fact, bound by their culture” (p. 86).

Nida and Taber (1969) define the process of translating as involving the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by one social group into the appropriate expression of another group which entails a process of cultural de-coding, re-coding and en-coding. Therefore, it is important that translators develop a competence to shift to the target language by not only the lexical content but by taking into account the cultural aspects, as well, (Bassnett, 1980). Newmark (1988) proposes two opposing methods that can be used while translating, transference and componential analysis. According to Newmark (1988), transference gives "local colour," keeping cultural names and concepts. Although this method emphasizes culture, Newmark(1988) believes that it may cause problems for the general readership and limit the comprehension of certain aspects. The importance of the translation process in

communication led Newmark(1988) to propose componential analysis which he describes as being "the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message" (p. 96).

Thus, culture can take several forms once involved in translation. These forms consist of lexical context, syntax, norms, values and beliefs. As a matter of fact, a good translator should be familiar with the culture, customs, and social settings of the source and target language. He should also be familiar with different social norms of both languages. This awareness, can improve the quality of the translations to a great extent.

8. Cultural Implications for Translation

Different cultural implications have been presented in the field of translation (Bassnett, 1991; Mounin, 1963). These cultural implications may take several forms ranging from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and ways of life in a given culture. Some of them are:

- The translator has to value cultural aspects to see to what extent they are needed into the target language.
- Opposing methods are proposed by Newmark (1988) transference and componential.
- Nida (1964) presented formal and dynamic equivalence. According to Nida (1964), a "gloss translation" mostly typifies formal equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible and the TL reader is able to "understand as much as he can of the customs, manners of thought, and means of expression" of the SL context (Nida, 1964). Dynamic equivalence "tries to relate the receptor to modes of behaviour relevant within the context of his own culture" without insisting that he "understands the cultural patterns of the source-language context".

- Coulthard (1992) believes that the ideal reader is the one for whom the author “attributes knowledge of certain facts, memory of certain experiences ... plus certain opinions, preferences and prejudices and a certain level of linguistic competence”.
- When considering such elements, it should be considered that the extent to which the author may be influenced by such notions is belonging to his own sense of belonging to a specific socio-cultural group.

Conclusion

No research paper and no research in general is perfect or error free. Rather, we do believe that if good research papers attempt answers to questions and understanding of new phenomena, they also ask further questions to invite other researchers to pursue the same line of inquiry to expand the scope of knowledge. What makes of translation an even more difficult task is its two-fold complexity. In fact, if differences between languages are experienced as difficulties, those between cultures lead to more severe complications. Some words are so culture bound that they find no equivalent in any other culture.

Any suggested equivalent word will simply stand as a corruption of meaning. Translation procedures and strategies have failed to solve this problem. So did the various taxonomies suggested and the ever increasing number of theories. Perfect synonyms do not exist in one language because of the very subtle differences between the various ways and contexts they can be used in. the complexity of words use becomes greater when they are used as concepts. When the perception of concepts varies from one individual to another in the same language and in the same culture, one can imagine the level of complexity when looking for equivalents to these words in another language, in another culture. For these

reasons, and so many others, the translator has to be linguistically skilled, culturally and interculturally aware and competent. Otherwise, any attempt to translate would turn into subversion. Some of the questions that need further investigation are:

1. In which language is translation likely to be more successful? In a mother tongue or in a foreign language?
2. To which extent can a well thought translation technology help the translator?
3. How can Man and machine co-exist and inform each other to perform the act of translating?

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