



# The Role of Translator in Intercultural Communication

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## Abstract

Translation/interpretation has always been central to intercultural communication. Lack of knowledge of another culture may cause confusion, misunderstanding or even offense during communication process and it also makes the conclusion of international or bilateral agreements difficult or impossible. To the extent that without communication there can be no negotiation, communication is obviously integral to the success of the mission. It is necessary for a translator or an interpreter to realize the importance of having a cultural background when taking part of this kind of negotiations, which can affect thousands of people. Therefore, this paper aims to offer a closer analysis of the translation profession from the point of view of intercultural communication.

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## 1. Introduction

In a variety of fields like scientific domain, academic research, business, management, education, health, culture, politics, diplomacy, development etc. the importance of intercultural communication cannot be denied. With the help of travel, international media and internet, communication among people becomes easy. In order not to isolate the rest of the world and to survive in such a kind of environment everybody needs to interact with each other. Therefore, intercultural communication is a *must* for every people. The position of translation in intercultural communication is fundamental. It is necessary for both international business and social relations. The purpose of translation is transmitting of the ideas and events through time and space to make something understood, to accomplish, to prove. The world that is increasingly interlinked and translation fulfils a role by breaking down language barriers. From the professional point of view, translators play a role as intercultural communication experts, mediators, and the bridge between people,

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cultures, and opinions. In order to understand the role of translating or interpreting as a profession, it is needed to start with an exact definition of the profession. Then, the differences between translator and interpreter should be clarified by explaining their responsibilities. Also, from the perspective of intercultural communication, possible reasons behind inaccurate translations will be covered to shed light on to communication interruptions with some examples.

### 1.1. Who is a translator?

*noun*

*The definition of a translator is a person who helps people who speak different languages to communicate or who takes something (such as a speech or a book) in one language and who puts it into a different language for people to understand. (<https://www.yourdictionary.com>.)*

The above dictionary definition of *translator* is provided by <https://www.yourdictionary.com>. However, this definition is not enough to explain who exactly a translator is. Translator is not only the one who translates words from one language to another. Becoming a translator does not mean mastering at least two languages because in order to become valuable translators, mastering vocabulary and the grammar of languages are not enough to bring people coming from different cultural backgrounds. In the following, from the perspective of different translators having different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the profession of translating is tried to be explained (<https://theopenmic.co/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-translator>):

*Being a translator means removing a language barrier and, as much as possible, bridging a cultural gap between people. (Julia Thorton)*

*It means seeing the world through different eyes. As a translator, I work with people from all over the world. All of them have a different interpretation about life and other things. So, have more than two eyes while being a translator. (Sherif Abuzid)*

*Translator is a nobleman or noblewoman who translates the source language into target language. Also, he or she is a political researcher. Presidents or classy politicians speak through translator. Translation is a critical job, and your classy translation may save the world. (Qasem Mafi)*

*I understand that language is a living thing. So, new phrases and cultural references are constantly being added as the time passes so translators need to embrace the culture of the languages they are dealing with and also the current events, as those have a major impact on the way people communicate. So, to me, translation means it's not just conveying meaning from one language to another, they re-create. It's*

*architecture of words building bridges that connect people and cultures from around the world.* (Sirajul Islam)

*Translation brings together lots of things that I love: storytelling, communication, learning (to name a few). Being a translator is bringing information, stories and culture from different parts of the world to people who might never have the chance of learning a second (or third) language. It means facilitating communication in small (individuals) and big scale (corporations). And I learn something new every day! Either new words, or instructions to use a new equipment!* (Mariana Alves Passos).

It can be understood from the above explanations that a translator is a mediator between two different languages two different cultures. A translator is also an expert in intercultural communication, whose task is to create a bridge and aid others to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. Therefore, a translator should have the mastery of fields like translation, interpretation, work organisation, procurement of services, and management of intercultural communication processes. Translations indeed represent the place where cultures, previously separated, come together and establish ongoing relations. So, it is quite obvious why translations have become so important and the translator is not just the person who translate words, but the one who can find the best way to transpose the main ideas, so that the intended audience gets them right. He/She should also take into consideration the social and political background, within which the translation takes place.

The purpose of translation is to serve as a substitute for the original, making it intelligible for people who cannot read the language in which it was written. This heavy responsibility creates a burden on the translator. Awareness of history is an essential requirement for the translator of a work coming from a totally different country culture. Knowledge of a foreign language with its vocabulary and grammar is not enough to make one competent as a translator. It is essential to have a thorough knowledge of his/her own culture and own language and be aware of the source-language culture before attempting to build any bridge between them.

In order to understand the responsibilities of a translator/interpreter during communication process, there is a need to explain the differences between translator and interpreter. Both are closely related, and quite similar to each other, yet they are also very different. They both basically translate from one language into another; however, there are several differences too.

Most people know that translation involves retaining the original meaning of the source text, and not a literal translation. The words used are often different, but they convey the same meaning. Surprisingly, people think of interpretation as a word for word translation – but that is not the case. An interpretation is often a paraphrased version of the original message. The followings are the similarities between these two professionals:

- They are both linguists.
- They both translate a message from one language to another.
- Both professionals have thorough knowledge of the two languages they work with. This includes fluency, sentence structure, grammar, idioms, slang, and more.
- They both have an in-depth knowledge of the culture, customs, traditions, and so on of both the languages they work with.
- They both require professional qualifications.
- Neither interpretation nor translation is a word to word translation.
- Both translators and interpreters have to translate into the target language without changing the meaning of the message.

When the above items are examined, a translator and an interpreter have lots of features in common. However, there are also differences between these two professionals. The biggest difference between the two professionals is that the interpreter's role involves working with spoken communication, while a translator's role involves working with writing – websites, scripts, legal, technical or medical documents, manuals, and so on. Interpreting is all about translating something that is said, and translation is about translating something that is written. An interpreter is often required to translate back and forth; that is, from and into a particular language. However, translators usually only translate into a specific language – they don't have to translate from that language back into the original source language.

Interpreters are required to translate on the spot; at conferences, meetings, TV coverage signing for hearing impaired individuals, diplomatic mediations between nations, voice or video calls and so on. They have to listen very carefully to what the person is saying, retain it, and immediately translate it into the target language. A translation can be delivered long after the creation of the source text. So a translator gets much more time to perform the translation, and can be more thorough and precise, and deliver high quality work. Therefore, interpreters have to rely on their learning, knowledge and experience because they have to translate immediately. They don't have the convenience of any reference materials but translators have more time to search online, use dictionaries, style guides, glossaries, or even take the help of others to deliver an accurate translation. For example, when they have completed translating a document, they often pass it on to an editor, who will check the document for accuracy but no such process happens in interpretation.

Translators often benefit from technology; they use some computer aided translation tools to provide the best possible work. An interpreter has no such facility because they do not have enough time to access such tools. Another difference between translators and interpreters is related to accuracy. Translators are required to maintain a very high level of accuracy in their work but it is acceptable for interpreters if the accuracy is slightly

lower because the emphasis is on conveying the message without altering the meaning in any way. Sometimes, it is not really necessary to translate the entire speech so, they have the liberty to leave out certain parts. A translator on the other hand, must translate the source document entirely; they do not have the freedom to choose what to translate and what not to.

Translators have to maintain a particular format and style of writing; there are different styles of writing for technical documents, legal documents, user manuals, medical reports, film scripts and so on; the translator also has to be careful with punctuations. However, an interpreter does not have to bother with all these things; they have something else to worry about: they need to match the tone, the modulation and inflections of the speaker, because they are vital in spoken communication. These are verbal cues which convey a lot to the audience.

Both translation and interpretation are sensitive processes. Therefore, it is very important to choose the right words and to convey them in an appropriate language otherwise this may cause some translation errors. In the following section, some examples including translation errors are determined by BBC Culture.

### *1.2. History's Biggest Translation Errors*

The most recent changes in technology affect the field of interpretation. It brings individuals more like a reality where language is never again an obstacle. This innovation gives an impression about future where there are no linguistic boundaries. BBC Culture investigates the biggest mistranslations of the past including a nineteenth Century astronomer discovering indications of intelligent life on Mars and a US president stating a sexual desire for a whole country.

#### *Life on Mars*

At the point when Italian astronomer Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli started mapping Mars in 1877, he accidentally dislodged a whole sci-fi oeuvre. The chief of Milan's Brera Observatory named dull and light regions on the planet's surface 'oceans' and 'mainlands' – describing what he thought were channels with the Italian word 'canali'. Lamentably, his fellows deciphered that as 'trenches', propelling a theory that they had been made by intelligent lifeforms on Mars.

US astronomer Percival Lowell mapped many them somewhere in the range of 1894 and 1895, persuaded that the canals were genuine (Lowell, 1911). Over the accompanying two decades he distributed three books on Mars with representations showing what he thought were artificial structures used for conveying water by an amazing race of engineers. H. G. Wells influenced by Lowell's theory published his own book about intelligent Martians. In *The War of the Worlds*, which originally showed up in serialized structure in 1897, H. G. Wells characterized an attack of Earth by destructive Martians and realized a science fiction subgenre (Wells, 1897). *A Princess of Mars*, a novel by Edgar

Rice Burroughs published in 1911, likewise carries a perishing Martian civilisation into the cutting edge, utilizing Schiaparelli's names for highlights on the planet (Burroughs, 1911).

While the trenches used for carrying water were a result of language and a zealous creative mind, astronomers currently affirm that there are no channels on the surface of Mars. As indicated by Nasa, "The network of crisscrossing lines covering the surface of Mars was only a product of the human tendency to see patterns, even when patterns do not exist. When looking at a faint group of dark smudges, the eye tends to connect them with straight lines." (Aerospace Scholars, 2009).

### *Pole position*

Jimmy Carter realized how to get a crowd to pay interest. In a speech given during his 1977 visit to Poland, he seemed to state sexual desire for the Communist country or that is the thing that his translator said. It turned out Carter had said he wanted to know about the Polish individuals' 'desires for the future'.

His interpreter additionally translated "I left the United States at the beginning of today" into "I left the United States, never to return". As per Time magazine, even his innocent statement that Carter was glad to be in Poland turned into the case that "he was glad to grasp Poland's private parts".

It isn't astonishing that the President utilized a different interpreter when he gave a toast at a state feast later in a similar trip. In the wake of conveying his first line, Carter stopped to be translated but the interpreter remained quiet. After a different line, he was again met by quiet. The explanation was that the new interpreter couldn't comprehend the President's English and had concluded that the best way was to stay silent. At the point when Carter's excursion finished, he had become the punchline for some a Polish joke.

### *Keep digging*

In 1956 at a reception at the Polish embassy in Moscow, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was deciphered as saying "We will bury you" to Western ambassadors. The expression showed up in magazine covers and newspaper headlines causing relations cooling between the Soviet Union and the West.

However, Khrushchev's words were nearer to signifying "Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will dig you in". He was showing that Communism would outlive capitalism, which would decimate itself from inside, alluding to an entry in Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto that contended "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers." (Marx, 1990). While not the most quieting phrase he could have expressed, it was not the sabre-rattling threat that excited enemies of Communists and raised the dream of a nuclear attack in the minds of Americans. Khrushchev himself decontaminated his announcement – in spite of the fact that not for quite a long while. "I once said 'We will bury you', and I got into trouble with it", he said in 1963 during a speech

in Yugoslavia, “Of course we will not bury you with a shovel. Your own working class will bury you.”

### *Diplomatic immunity*

Mistranslations during negotiations have regularly demonstrated disputable. Disarray over the French word 'demander', signifying 'to ask', exacerbated talks among Paris and Washington in 1830. After a secretary made an interpretation of a message sent to the White House that started "le gouvernement français demande" as "the French government requests", the US President disagreed with what he comprehended as a lot of requests. At the point when the mistake was redressed, arrangements went on.

A few specialists have been blamed for misusing contrasts in language for their own closures. A composed understanding named as The Treaty of Waitangi, between the British Crown and the Māori individuals in New Zealand was marked by 500 innate boss in 1840 (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/the-treaty-in-brief>). However, clashing accentuations in the English and Māori adaptations have caused discusses, with a blurb asserting 'The Treaty is a fake' highlighting in the Māori fight development.

### *Taking the long view*

In 1972 during Richard Nixon's visit to China, Chinese head administrator Zhou Enlai broadly said it was 'too soon to tell' about the impacts of the French Revolution. He was adulated for his savvy words, acknowledged as reflecting Chinese way of thinking. In any case, he was really alluding to the May 1968 occasions in France. It was to a greater extent a misconception than a mistranslation, one frequently rehashed expression may have been strengthened by racial generalizations.

As expressed by the resigned US ambassador Charles W Freeman Jr., during the memorable excursion Nixon's translator misjudged remark was “one of those advantageous false impressions that never gets rectified.” Freeman stated: “I can't clarify the disarray about Zhou's remark barring from the perspective which it helpfully supported a generalization (as common with all generalizations, incompletely discerning) about Chinese authorities as far-sighted people who think in longer terms than their Western partners”.

As mentioned above, translation errors can have many causes. Whatever the reason, translation errors are inexcusable, especially in the case of diplomatic relations and human health. In the following section, the reasons for translation errors in general are categorized.

## **2. The Reasons for Translation Errors**

Written and oral translation services have caused significant problems throughout history. Translation errors have led to economic and diplomatic crises, and sometimes have led innocent people to serve years in prison. A man who was sentenced to 21 years in prison for murder in Italy was released when he was found to be innocent.

*“According to Italian press reports, Angelo Massaro, now 51, was found guilty of a 1995 murder in Taranto, in the southern Puglia region, and sentenced to 24 years in prison. Although Massaro denied the accusation, he was convicted of “informing” an informer and “evidence” of tapping. However, after 21 years, Massaro’s imprisonment of the phone that led to the imprisonment appeared to be misinterpreted. Speaking in dialect specific to the region of Puglia Massaro’s wife in the phone call “a burden” carries, but Massaro’s “burdens” used in the meaning of “muers” word “muert” (dead) was recorded. Massaro was released 21 years later at the time of the murder, proving that he was in a medical facility for the treatment of drug addiction.”*

### 2.1. Inexperienced Interpreters

Although not very common, inexperienced translators are prone to error. If inexperienced interpreters are involved in interpreting, then many mistakes are inevitable and they may cause a big crisis. As an example, in 2012, two interpreters’ crisis created a crisis during an important symposium due to the lack of legal terminology. At the symposium organized by Turkish Academy of Justice, the public prosecutor Felice Casson shared his experiences with judges and prosecutors. During the presentation of Italian Senator Casson, simultaneous translation was abandoned when two interpreters had difficulty in translation. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=11&v=XPUyvYnE2go&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=11&v=XPUyvYnE2go&feature=emb_title).

### 2.2. Lack of editorial supervision in written translations

Translation errors are often encountered in oral translations, but mistakes are also made in written translations. Although some of these errors are minimized nowadays, one of the most important reasons for errors in written translations is the lack of editorial supervision. Editors’ check for errors made the last time files are delivered. It reviews dozens of factors, especially spelling mistakes. Usually, files that need to be delivered quickly will be overridden by the editor control. Therefore, mistakes are inevitable.

### 2.3. Inaccurate Terminology



In technical, medical, legal and academic terminology, texts can be translated perfectly according to the experience and knowledge capacity of the translator. For example, it is impossible to translate the text accurately if you do not have enough knowledge of medical issues. Therefore, texts and projects should be directed to interpreters in the fields they specialize.

#### 2.4. Pressure on Interpreters

Interpreting is an area that needs not only knowledge but also talent. On the one hand, interpreter tries to understand what is spoken, and on the other hand, he passes it on. All translation takes place in a few seconds. Therefore, an interpreter has to have a cache memory that can extract the words that are stored in the deepest within 400-500 milliseconds.

In such a kind of race against time, the participation of diplomats and professors as speakers in verbal translations increases the tension in the environment. Interpreters are exposed to lots of words, terms and expressions so; the interpreter needs to be talented and knowledgeable, as well as self-confident.

#### 2.5. Avoiding Translation

One of the most recent translation problems is not related to translation error itself; it is interpreter's "preference not to translate". Sometimes interpreters either soften or skip the whole subject while interpreting to avoid damaging diplomatic relations or inclining cultural and social misunderstandings. These events are mentioned translation/interpretation errors in the news on TV. However, it is more a matter of choice. For example, translation errors that are important in diplomatic relations made in recent interviews between the U.S. and Turkey and these errors are labelled as a scandal in the news in Turkey.

President Tayyip Erdogan and US President Donald Trump held a joint press conference (<https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2017/dunya/erdogan-ve-trumpin-basin-toplantisina-ceviri-hatasi-damga-vurdu-1854422>). During the conference Erdogan said:

*“Terör örgütleriyle ilkeli ve kararlı mücadele konusunda geçmişte yaşanan hataları telafi edecek adımların devamının geleceğini ümit ediyoruz.”*

Despite Erdoğan's words, which were clearly stated, the interpretation of these words was diametrically opposed. The interpreter translated Erdoğan's words:

*“And we know that, in terms of keeping up with the principled and committed fight against the terrorist organizations all around the world, we will not repeat the mistakes of the past and we will continue down this path together.”*

This caused an image of Erdoğan "as if he accepted a mistake". This was not the only mistake at the press conference. Another statement of Erdoğan was:

*“YPG ve PYD terör örgütlerinin hangi ülke olursa olsun muhatap alınması bu konuda küresel düzeyde olan mutabakata kesinlikle uygun değildir.”*

However, the interpreter skipped the expression “terrorist organizations” that Erdoğan used for PYD-YPG and passed on these organizations only by their names:

*“Taking YPG and PYD in the region - taking them into consideration in the region, it will never be accepted, and it is going to be against a global agreement that we have reached.”*

The reason behind the errors of interpreter was not exactly known. According to the statements of the authorities, a copy of the text that Erdoğan had read from the paper was in the translator. The fact that the interpreter performed the translation very quickly without any misfire also reinforces the possibility that the text has already been prepared. There were three main scenarios asserted in the lobbies related to this scandal for translation: According to the first scenario, Erdoğan's speech was translated incorrectly into English by Turkish translators. The second possibility is that Erdoğan's speech was translated simultaneously and the translator misunderstood the words. Last but not least, Erdoğan's words were deliberately distorted by the White House translator.

### 3. Conclusions

The progress of modern social life, new development in international relations and formation of so-called "intercultural communication" requires abandoning many of the traditional stereotypes and methods of translation. Intercultural communication with a highlight on specific cultural background knowledge has commenced to play an utmost role shaping broad-minded translators, well-aware of ethnic, cultural and other peculiarities of given language. The notion of intercultural communication is defined by Council of Europe (2001) as “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts”.

In this regard, the term of ‘intercultural communication’ has a primordial significance within growing tendencies of globalization and international cooperation in different spheres, where the translator is required to receive a proper training not only in the sphere of foreign languages but also in the intercultural communication. Thus, according to the “White Paper on Intercultural Communication” by the Council of Europe (2001), the intercultural communication is understood as “a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others.” Intercultural

communication plays an essential role in such fields as political, social, cultural and economic integration and the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. It is aimed at developing a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, visions of the world and practices; enhancing integration and co-operation, as well as fostering equality and tolerance.

The prerequisites of an effective intercultural communication cannot be limited to a merely good command of an international language. Still, apart from the linguistic factor, such notions as equal dignity and mutual respect, gender equality, the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of the law comprise a set of conditions, necessary for a fruitful intercultural communication. It should not be overlooked that there are a lot of barriers to intercultural communication. Some of these are the outcomes of the difficulty in communicating in several languages. But others concern the domain of politics: racism, xenophobia, intolerance and all other forms of hate speech confront to the very idea of dialogue and create structural barriers, hindering the communication.

It is evident that the interpreters play a vital role as cultural mediators between people who need to communicate but do not speak the same language. The role of interpretation as an intercultural communication is like a bridge, which demands that interpreters not only master exquisite language techniques, but also rich and generous knowledge of different cultural backgrounds. The important functions of intercultural awareness during intercultural communication were always kept in mind. Therefore, it can be concluded that the interpreter/translator needs to strengthen the sensitivity not only to linguistic differences but also to cultural differences, so that misunderstandings can be effectively reduced, and intercultural communication can be successfully achieved.

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