CULTURAL CONSIDERATION IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

In this article analyzed cultural consideration in translation. As we know, translation is a kind of activity, which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions. As this statement implies, translators permanently faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects implicit in a source text (ST) and of finding the most appropriate technique of successfully conveying these aspects in the target language (TL). These problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between the two (or more) languages concerned.

The cultural implications for translation may take several forms ranging from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and ways of life in a given culture. The translator also has to decide on the importance given to certain cultural aspects and to what extent it is necessary or desirable to translate them into the TL. The aims of the ST will also have implications for translation as well as the intended readership for both the ST and the target text (TT).

Considering the cultural implications for a translated text implies recognizing all of these problems and taking into account several possibilities before deciding on the solution, which appears the most appropriate in each specific case. Before applying these methods to the chosen text, this essay will examine the importance of culture in translation through a literature review. The different general procedures of treating the cultural implications for translation will be examined as well as analyzing the ST and the aims of the author. The translation process will also be treated using specific examples found in the ST before discussing the success of aforementioned theoretical methods applied to the TT.

Key words: cultural implication, translation, target language, a source text, lexical content.

Introduction

The definition of "culture" as given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary varies from descriptions of the "Arts" to plant and bacteria cultivation and includes a wide range of intermediary aspects. More specifically concerned with language and translation, Newmark defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (1988: 94), thus acknowledging that each language group has its own culturally specific features. He further clearly states that operationally he does "not regard language as a component or feature of culture" (Newmark 1988: 95) in direct opposition to the view taken by Vermeer who states that "language is part of a culture" (1989: 222). According to Newmark, Vermeer's stance would imply the impossibility to translate whereas for the latter, translating the source language (SL) into a suitable form of TL is part of the translator's role in transcultural communication.

The notion of culture is essential to considering the implications for translation and, despite the differences in opinion as to whether language is part of culture or not, the two notions appear to be inseparable. Discussing the problems of correspondence in translation, Nida confers equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the SL and the TL and concludes that "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (Nida, 1964: 130). It is further explained that parallels in culture often provide a common understanding despite significant formal shifts in the translation. The cultural implications for translation are thus of significant importance as well as lexical concerns.

Lotman's theory states 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" (Lotman, 1978: 211-32). Bassnett (1980: 13-14) underlines the importance of this double consideration when translating by stating that language is "the heart within the body of culture," the survival of both aspects being interdependent. Linguistic notions of transferring meaning are seen as being only part of the translation process; "a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria" must also be considered. As Bassnett further points out, "the translator must tackle the SL text in such a way that the TL version will correspond to the SL version. To attempt to impose the value system of the SL culture onto the TL culture is dangerous ground" (Bassnett, 1980: 23). Thus, when translating, it is important to consider not only the lexical impact on the TL reader, but also the manner in which cultural aspects may be perceived and make translating decisions accordingly.

Translation services link one language to another by taking careful consideration of the social groups involved; this is very difficult and can be done wrong if one is not careful. As cultures are increasingly brought into larger connection one with another, multicultural considerations are brought to tolerance to an ever-increasing degree. We are not just dealing with words written in a certain time, but with the aspect of the text as well.

Vast cultural differences play a role, because it has had an impact on nearly all the people worldwide, as well as on the international relations rising from the present new world order. Also, as technology develops and grows at a fast pace, nations and their cultures have started merging. Boundaries are becoming more unclear, when they once were sharply outlined.

Translators offering translation services today faced with many different cultures. They are required to provide translation services that relay messages from one culture to another, and make it a smooth and solidly understood translation. The idiosyncrasies and cultural expressions must be known first hand. We are not talking about a minimum knowledge of having studied the language, but about a vast and thorough understanding of having the language as a native tongue. It referred to as cross-cultural translation and it relied upon heavily by organizations around the globe.

It is their task to focus primarily on the source culture and target culture, but this is not cut and dry. The answer is not clear-cut. Nevertheless, the dominant criterion is the communicative function of the target text. Attention is drawn to the fact that among the assortment of translation methodology, the use of the integrated approach seems the most widely used. This approach follows the model in which having a global vision of the text, at hand, is of primary importance. This type of methodology focuses on turning the macro into the micro, so to speak.

In addition, the trans-coding process should be focused not merely on language transfer but also - and most importantly on cultural transposition. As an inevitable consequence of the previous statement, translators must be both bilingual and bicultural if not multicultural [18; p. 22]

When dealing with diverse cultures it can sometimes be the simple mistakes we make, like showing the soles of our shoes or giving a thumbs up, that can ruin a relationship or lose a very important client. Learning the similarities and differences in customs, mores and traditions, or seeking the professional help of a translation services agency can make all the difference. Learning the simple cultural do's and don'ts can avoid this and help generate respect and understanding. Also, due to the number of people working in offices abroad, non-US nationals coming to work in the US, and frequent business trips all around the world, the need for language skills is imperative. Thus, the proper use of translation services is vital to a successful business relationship.

Language and Culture

The power of language to reflect culture and influence thinking was first proposed by an American linguist and anthropologist, Edward Sapir (1884–1939), and his student, Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941). The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis stated that the way we think and view the world is determined by our language (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2002; Crystal, 1987; Hayes, Ornstein, & Gage, 1987). Instances of cultural language differences are evidenced in that some languages have specific words for concepts whereas other languages use several words to represent a specific concept. For example, the Arabic language includes many specific words for designating a certain type of horse or camel (Crystal, 1987). To make such distinctions in English, where specific words do not exist, adjectives would be used preceding the concept label, such as quarter horse or dray horse.

Cultural differences have also been noted in the ways in which language is used pragmatically. In our American culture, new skills are typically taught and learned through verbal instruction (Slobin, 1979). In some cultures, new skills are learned through nonverbal observation. A distinction has also been made between cultures that encourage independent learning and those that encourage cooperative learning (McLeod, 1994).

Differences in the social roles of adults and children also influence how language is used. Home and school contexts may represent different cultures, subcultures, or both and may influence language acquisition in noticeable ways. Nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expression) and contextual cues (e.g., shared experience) have different communicative roles in different cultures (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003). In some cultures, prelinguistic children (who are not yet verbalizing) are spoken about rather than spoken to (Heath, 1983). Children may be expected, and thus taught, to speak only when an adult addresses them. They are not encouraged to initiate conversations with adults or to join spontaneously in ongoing adult conversations. Additionally, in some cultures, children who enthusiastically volunteer answers at school are considered show-offs (Peregoy & Boyle, 1993). In some cultural settings, children are not asked recitational questions. Instead, they are asked only questions of clarification or for new information. Thus, when these children experience recitational questions in a school setting, they may be confused as to the purpose of the questioning and the expected response.

Further cultural differences in how language is used in educational settings have been documented by Tharp (1994). These differences include variations in how stories are told, the wait time given by teachers to students during questioning sequences, the rhythmic patterns

of the verbal interactions, and the patterns of conversational turn-taking.

During the 1970s and 1980s, educators and linguists researched and debated the verbal-deficit perspective. This perspective contended that anyone who did not use standard English did not have a valid language and thus was verbally deficient. Although the verbal-deficit perspective has now been proven invalid, it is important to understand the research that was conducted to either support or discredit that perspective. Bernstein (1971), Bereiter and Englemann (1966), and Labov (1979) were among the researchers who studied language differences between different social groups, including middle- and lower-income groups and ethnic groups. This body of research identified specific differences in the way children from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds used language in school and out-of-school settings. Implications of this research have been widely discussed and interpreted in a variety of ways.

Basil Bernstein (1971) documented the different linguistic codes used by children from lower- and middle-income families in England. Lower-income children were described as using a "restricted code" or highly contextualized language, while children from middle-income families used an "elaborated code," or decontextualized language. His research also documented differences in school achievement for these two groups of children. Interpretations of Bernstein's work concluded a cause–effect relation between language use and school success, supporting a "verbal deficit" perspective: the working-class environment of the low-income children created a verbal deficiency responsible for subsequent low educational achievement (Winch, 1990).

Here in the United States, Bereiter and Englemann (1966) conducted further research from the verbal-deficit perspective. They focused on the language of preschool African American children in Urbana, Illinois. Bereiter and Engleman concluded that the language used by African American children was not a valid language and thus recommended that these children needed to be taught English in the school setting (Winch, 1990). Academically oriented preschool curricula were developed (e.g., Blank, Rose, & Berlin, 1978) to provide the needed English language training for verbally deficient children [16; p. 33].

William Labov (1979; Winch, 1990) explored social dialects of lower income African American children in urban settings. He studied the differences in children's in-school and out-of-school (e.g., playground) language competencies. His data directly challenged the verbal-deficit theory because it documented the elaborated and systematic linguistic properties of Black English. His research supported the idea that Black English was a separate language system with its own grammar and rules. Labov described dialects as having "slightly different versions of the same rules, extending and modifying the grammatical processes which are common to all dialects of English" (Labov, 1995, p. 54). Labov's research supported the idea that verbal differences are not verbal deficits. Because Labov's research focused on language used in academic and nonschool settings, he also created a greater awareness of the role of context and dialect in communication.

Tough (1977) conducted a longitudinal study of children from advantaged (college-educated, professional parents) and disadvantaged (parents who were in unskilled or semiskilled occupations) homes. The study began when the children were 3 years old, with follow-up at 5 1/2 and 7 1/2 years. At age 3, the disadvantaged children and the advantaged children showed significant differences in the ways they used language. Specifically, the disadvantaged children did not use language to recall and give details of prior experiences,

anticipate upcoming events and possible outcomes, reason about current and remembered events, problem solve using language for planning and considering alternatives, reach solutions, create and sustain dramatic play events, and understand others' experiences and feelings. When these children were studied again at 5 1/2 and 7 1/2 years, the disadvantaged children produced shorter, less complex responses. This research contributed to our understanding that children from different cultural environments may be learning to use language differently and may experience difficulty in participating in the language environment in classrooms.

Further awareness of the role of cultural environments in the acquisition of language was influenced in the 1980s by ethnographic research techniques that were used by language researchers. Ethnographic studies have contributed significantly to our understanding of linguistic diversity. Ethnography uses participant observation in real-life settings and focuses on individuals within their social and cultural contexts. In her ethnographic study, Heath (1983) explored children's acquisition of language at home and school in two communities in the southeastern United States. She found differences in communication in working-class black and white families as well as among middle-class townspeople of both ethnic groups.

Language and culture may thus be seen as being closely related and both aspects must be considered for translation. When considering the translation of cultural words and notions, Newmark proposes two opposing methods: transference and componential analysis (Newmark, 1988: 96). As Newmark mentions, transference gives "local colour," keeping cultural names and concepts. Although placing the emphasis on culture, meaningful to initiated readers, he claims this method may cause problems for the general readership and limit the comprehension of certain aspects. The importance of the translation process in communication leads Newmark to propose componential analysis which he describes as being "the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message" (Newmark, 1988: 96). This may be compared to the scale proposed by Hervey et al, visualised as follows:

Nida's definitions of formal and dynamic equivalence (see Nida, 1964:129) may also be seen to apply when considering cultural implications for translation. According to Nida, 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, manner of thought, and means of expression" of the SL context (Nida, 1964: 129). Contrasting with this idea, dynamic equivalence "tries to relate the receptor to modes of behaviour relevant within the context of his own culture" without insisting that he "understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context" (idem).

It is generally agreed that language and culture are closely related. Language can be viewed as a verbal expression of culture. It is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Language provides us with many of the categories we use for expression of our thoughts, so it is therefore natural to assume that our thinking is influenced by the language which we use. The values and customs in the country we grow up in shape the way in which we think to a certain extent.

Cultures hiding in languages, examines the link between Japanese language and culture. An Insight into Korean Culture through the Korean Language discusses how Korean culture influences the language.

Languages spoken in Ireland, focuses on the status of the Irish language nowadays and

how it has changed over time. In our big world every minute is a lesson looks at intercultural communication and examines how it can affect interactions between people from countries and backgrounds.

General cultural implications for translation

Another point of view, however, asserts the opposite. Ironically this also goes back to Humboldt's idea bout inner and outer forms of language. Later it is developed into the concepts of deep structure and surface structure by Chomsky. Inner form and deep structure is what generally known as idea. Following this concepts, all ideas are universal. What is different is only the surface structure, the outer from. If it is so, translation is only a change of surface structure to represent the universal deep structure. Accordingly, translation is theoretically always possible.

All in all, we are faced with two extremes. Which one is right? The answer, according to Snell-Hornby (1988: 41) lies not in choosing any of the two. If the extremes are put at the ends of a cline, the answer lies between the two. In brief, theoretically the degree of probability for perfect translation depends on how far the source language text (SLT) is embedded in its culture and the greater the distance between the culture between SLT and target language text (TLT), the higher is the degree of impossibility. See the following excerpts for illustration. The source language (SL) is Indonesian and the target language (TL) is English.

This ritual is led by the mother of the child being "ruwat" (cleansed?) by showering him with "kembang setaman" (flower??) water. After being cleansed, the child is dresed in Javanese traditional clothes specially designed for him. The ("ruwat") child is then guided by Ki Dalang (the puppeteer??) and accompnied by the elders (the grandmother, aunts, etc.) to pay a homage to by bowing down to earth in front of the father and mother[13;p.28].

Reading the texts, we can imagine that translating the first text is easier than the second, and the second is easier than the last. The difficulty is caused by the culturally-bound words (concepts) found in each text.

Practically, however, the depth of embededness of a text into its culture is not the first consideration. The purpose of translating is the first determinant. If the purpose of translating text (2) and (3), for example, is to give general introduction of a certain type of text or culture, the TL should not carry all the meaning possessed by the SLT. The words underlined and put in the brackets will do. In this case there are a lot of possibilities for the TL.

However, if the purpose is to present the Javanese culture before the English readership, the italicized words should be used and accompanied with a lot of explanation. Supposed the two paragraphs are parts of a novel, and the translator wants to keep the local color, only the italicized words should be used. These different purposes govern the choice of translation procedures. Yet, if the purpose of translating text (2) and (3) is to present all the meaning, beauty, and style contained in it, then, translation is impossible.

Cultural categories

It has already been noted that the text in this case is surely intended for "an educated, middle-class readership" and, more specifically, a French one with knowledge of the foreign cultural aspects implied. The problems when translating such a text are therefore not only of a purely lexical character but also of an equally fundamental nature - the understanding of a social, economic, political and cultural context as well as connotative aspects of a more semantic character. As with all texts of foreign literature, historical, political and other such

cultural references are always of a certain importance and the TT reader is unlikely to have a full understanding of such notions. When considering the cultural implications for translation, the extent to which it is necessary for the translator to explain or complete such an information gap should be taken into account; based on conclusions reached concerning the ideal TT reader, the translator should decide how much may be left for the reader to simply infer.

Considering these last points, different elements discussed in relation to their cultural implications for translation. The different aforementioned theories considered and their relative pertinence examined.

Adapting Nida, Newmark places "foreign cultural words" in several categories (Newmark 1988: 95-102). These aspects may be translated in different ways according to their role in the text and the aims for the TT reader. Newmark also states the relevance of componential analysis in translation "as a flexible but orderly method of bridging the numerous lexical gaps, both linguistic and cultural, between one language and another" (Newmark, 1988: 123). The two orientations in translation examined by Nida, namely formal or dynamic equivalence, should also be considered when analysing the cultural implications for translation of elements in these categories.

"Food is for many the most sensitive and important expression of national culture; food terms are subject to the widest variety of translation procedures" (Newmark, 1988: 97). The terms coming under this category are further complicated due to the "foreign" elements present. One such case is the reference to the brightly coloured pâtisseries tunisiennes. Translating according to the French idea of patisseries would imply using the English "cakes" or "pastries" yet in the context of Tunisian culture this hardly seems appropriate bearing in mind the difference in form of the TL reference. This illustrates the theory developed by Mounin (1963) who underlines the importance of the signification of a lexical item claiming that only if this notion is considered will the translated item fulfil its function correctly. In this case the translation as "sweets" seems to correspond to the idea of the original signification, even if it is a more abstract translation of the French original, and is therefore more appropriate concerning its function in the TT than a translation of formal equivalence.

Another example of material culture includes an eponym, namely bouteilles de Sidi Brahim (l.42). In France this low-quality, Algerian wine is widely known and is the traditional drink with North African dishes, therefore widely sold in supermarkets as well as this type of small shop. This example can be seen as corresponding to the new ideal reader as described by Coulthard, having different cultural knowledge (Coulthard, 1992: 12) as an English-speaking reader would not necessarily know the name of this wine and even less its associations. By using strictly formal equivalence, all meaning would be lost. It would however be possible to neutralise the original term Sidi Brahim by translating as "wine" or else to introduce a form of componential analysis, translating as "cheap, Algerian wine." Sidi Brahim being the area where the wine is produced, it seems appropriate to keep the original term in the TT but it is necessary to add a qualifier, here "wine." In this way, although the cultural implications are not so strong as for an "initiated" French reader, the information is passed on and elucidated by a qualifier. The cultural implications automatically understood by the ST reader, namely the notion of cheap, low-quality wine, are not however conveyed, the emphasis in this context being on the exotic nature of the product as conveyed by Sidi Brahim and not on the low cost.

Conclusion

A variety of different approaches has been examined in relation to the cultural implications for translation. It is necessary to examine these approaches bearing in mind the inevitability of translation loss when the text is, as here, culture bound. Considering the nature of the text and the similarities between the ideal ST and TT reader, an important aspect is to determine how much missing background information the translator using these methods should provide. It has been recognized that in order to preserve specific cultural references certain additions need to be brought to the TT. This implies that formal equivalence should not be sought, as this is not justified when considering the expectations of the ideal TT reader. At the other end of Nida's scale, complete dynamic equivalence does not seem totally desirable either as cultural elements have been kept in order to preserve the original aim of the text, namely to present one aspect of life in France.

Thus, the cultural implications for translation of this kind of ST do not justify using either of these two extremes and tend to correspond to the definition of communicative translation, attempting to ensure that content and language present in the SL context is fully acceptable and comprehensible to the TL readership.

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