

Translation and Globalism

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Abstract. This paper looks at some aspects that influence the status of the translation profession in the 21st century and questions the impact of social, economic and cultural changes on life in general as well as on translation and interpretation.

Keywords: discourse, translation, acculturation

The status of translation in the 21st century

We live in a world of questions. If you open an internet site, more and more often you will be asked if you wish to read the translated contents of the page in question. Translation seems to appear everywhere. Have you joined the Translation World Cup 2014? The promised prize is advertised as follows:

Once your translation has been published for the first time, you can start asking your colleagues and friends to vote for you. On June 27th, if you win, you will get a prize and your name will be sent to Proz's 49,000 translation companies. (<http://worldcup.matecat.com/>)

This sounds promising to enthusiastic translators who wish to find work opportunities, and why not earn their fame, *eine gewisse Berühmtheit erlangen*, on which a skilled, hard-working translator *karriert épít*. It is interesting to observe the specific way in which the German expression contains the adjective *gewiss*, synonymous with the English adjective *certain*, which is missing from this English phrase, while the verbs in both languages imply an amount of work to be done in order to achieve the desired result: in this case, fame. We could explore further the connotations of the words in the expression, but the purpose of this example has been to illustrate that culture and language are intertwined, having

specific strategies for meaning assignment and expressions through language. Translators need to be aware of them. The Hungarian phrase above also contains a verb of action that describes effort and energy being invested into a process that will lead to an achievement. While there are many universals in culture, there are also many tricky subtleties that may pose problems when translating them.

Many translators and interpreters work hard nowadays on bridging the gap between cultures. They acquire knowledge of foreign languages and learning about the cultures of the world. They become (more or less) proficient users, and then apply their knowledge. They are fully aware that languages and cultures are closely linked and understand that cultural differences need to be mediated and made explicit through language use and other forms of communication.

What is translation then? At the beginning of the 20th century, a brave statement was made by a Hungarian man of letters, claiming the impossibility or inexistence of translation:

Translation – translation, actually, barely exists. It can be said to exist in the same way as one can render an image in blue, then in green and consider that they are the same. That may be the case, but the two images are not identical, as two people are not identical only on account of the fact that they each have lungs and liver, and they are not identical even as twins who look similar (Ignotus 1910)¹.

The 21st century has coined the term language services, one that is becoming more and more fashionable and, to a certain extent replacing the more traditional concepts of translation and interpretation. One website talks about language services as performances ranging “from interpretation to selling merchandise” (<http://translationexcellence.com/importance-language-fifa-world-cup/>).

Mathematically speaking, translation is used to describe a function that moves an object a certain distance, without altering the object in any way. The difficulty of transposing meaning from a source language to a target language lies in this (lack of) modification, while trying to preserve as much of the intended meaning as can possibly be grasped by a translator.

Thus, we could understand that today the process and products of translation come from a functional necessity to perform certain social roles in appropriate contexts. Translation serves a variety of purposes: we learn, we relate, we influence and help one another in translation. It enables us to learn and to better understand the external world – the world of events, other people and cultures. In the villages, small towns and cities of Transylvania, through the schools and colleges and into the business and manufacturing centres we find a collection of many different cultures. They coexist somewhat separately but also influencing each other. Corporations are expanding and business opportunities have an

1 Translated by me: A.P.

increasingly international dimension, making cultural awareness an essential skill for professional translators. They need to familiarize themselves with the values, beliefs, behaviour and ways of communicating, as well as the language and modes of thinking of a social group. In this way, translation is an acculturation enterprise, a process by which translators learn the rules and norms of a culture different from their native one.

Discourse, culture and translation

A discourse may be considered to be organizations of reality through language. Discourses affect our ideas, beliefs, views and expectations. The discourse of choice delivers the vocabulary, expressions and style needed to communicate. It has become one of the key terms in the humanities and the social sciences, encompassing the use of spoken, written and signed language and multimodal forms of communication. The unit of discourse may be seen to be larger than the sentence and phenomena of interest can range from silence, pauses in conversation, a single utterance, to a novel, a set of newspaper articles or a conversation.

In discourse analysis, which came into prominence in the late 1960s, the word discourse stands for communication that involves specialized knowledge of various kinds. Studies of discourse have been carried out within a variety of traditions that investigate the relations between languages, types of user communities and their specific knowledge, contexts where discourses are applied.

Discourses and their translation are observed in the use of spoken, written and sign language, as well as multimodal or multimedia forms of communication. Their analysis is therefore a field that provides much fertile ground for research. Van Dijk (2008: 111) noted that: “there are relatively few studies that examine the contextual constraints on, for instance, cohesion and coherence, topic choice, news or argumentation schemata ... or the strategies of persuasion and manipulation, among a host of other discourse properties”.

When translating from one language into another, knowledge of the grammatically correct forms may not be enough when trying to render the intended meaning. Modernist theorists view discourse as being functional. Discourse and language transformations are ascribed to progress or the need to develop new or more precise words to describe new discoveries or areas of interest. All human actions and social formations are related to language and can be regarded as systems of related elements. This means that it is the structure itself that determines the significance, meaning and function of the individual elements of a system.

Postmodernist theorists were interested in examining the variety of experience of individuals and groups, and emphasized differences over similarities and

common experiences. Postmodernists claimed that truth and knowledge are plural, contextual, and historically produced through discourses. Postmodern researchers therefore embarked on analysing discourses such as texts, language, policies and practices. French social theorist Michel Foucault developed an entirely original notion of discourse in his early work, especially in the *Archaeology of knowledge* (1972). Foucault's definition of discourse describes an organized way of constructing reality through systematic ordering of thoughts, ideas, attitudes and practices.

Social context naturally presupposes the existence of a particular society, with implicit and explicit values, norms, rules and laws, and with its particular conditions of life. According to Mey (1993: 182), this can be understood either as extending the individual utterances making up the text, i.e. co-text, or, alternatively, considering those utterances in their natural 'habitat', or the larger context in which people use language. Van Dijk wrote that contexts are "(inter)subjective constructs designed and ongoingly updated in interaction by participants as members of groups and communities" (Van Dijk 2008: x).

In the following, let us look at some Transylvanian words and their translations into English as a lingua franca in tourism, business, etc. The cake called *kókonya* is used in Gyergyószék and in the area of Bucovina by the Szekler community and its origins may go back to the Italian root *cuccagna*. It has been in use since 1518 and today it is also used to describe an Easter egg decorated with traditional folk drawings. Its use with the two meanings is limited to certain communities. Its Romanian equivalent might be *cozonac împletit de Paște*, of a similar function and purpose, though in reality the two look different and their recipes differ. Another regionalism is the Hungarian *kákvirág* (narcissus stellaris), which describes a type of daffodil that resembles a star. Like other regionalisms, it may pose problems to translators, as will the word *csender*, though it appears as a family name quite frequently in Transylvania. *Csender* refers to a small area covered by bushes and it is used especially in Niraj Valley, in Mureș County. Another widely used Transylvanian word is *borvív* (sparkling mineral water), which is not recognized by Hungarians or Romanians from other regions.

Intertextuality and translation

Interdiscourse is a term used to reflect the implicit or explicit relations that a discourse has to other discourses. Among the researchers who were interested in this concept we should mention Fairclough's (1992) "orders of discourse". Interdiscourse often implies that elements are imported from another discourse. The meaning of interdiscourse varies, denoting three levels: a discourse has a relation to another discourse; relations between types of discourse such as genres

and relations between discursive formations, that is, between large heterogeneous discursive entities, such as the history of mechanics during the 19th century. This seems to imply that the aforementioned three levels might blend in order to create a complex view of a certain topic, for example, an account of the development of *fixing joints* in the 20th century. The interdiscursive blend is visible in most contemporary texts, including scientific research and popular magazine articles, as fields have become highly interdisciplinary, narrow and quite specific. This may imply the need for translators and interpreters to develop or enhance their competencies that will help them handle multidisciplinary texts.

An utterance may be contextualized in various ways and by using the term of interdiscursivity we denote how certain interpretations and relations to other discourses are socially more privileged than others. This implies that interdiscourse has a close affinity to the concepts of ideology, hegemony and power. Interdiscursivity is not only bound to ideology, but is a more open concept for analysing relations between discursive formations. What is acceptable discourse is in many respects a matter of interdiscursivity because the interdiscursive import and export relations constitute a sharing between the discursive entities, and this frames what is acceptable discourse within each discursive entity. Generally, a discourse has little authority over what other discourses are assumed to speak of and will therefore accept imported form and content from the other discourses. On the other hand, when a discourse exports content to other discourses, there are expectations as to the exported form and content. Thus, the interdiscursive system shapes the discourses.

Let us study fragments (a) and (b):

(a). Mechanical systems are exposed to the undesired effects of vibrations. Vibrations alter the positioning precision of the system, as well as other kinematic and dynamic parameters. ... Engineers and scientists came out with various ingenious solutions to diminish the effect of the mechanical vibrations. The solutions range from pure mechanical solutions to algorithms implemented as software solutions. (Rusu, Grama, Dattoma, in Scientific Bulletin of the Petru Maior University of Tg. Mureş, 2008: 15)

(b). Abstrakt. Die gegenwärtige Situation in der metallbearbeitenden Industrie ist dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass selbst anspruchsvolle Zerspanaufgaben produktiv und kostenminimiert zu lösen sind. ...

Keywords: Werkzeugentwicklung, Schneidengeometrie, Rundschafft. (Karpuschewski, Emmer, Schmidt, Nguyen at the 12th International Conference on Tools, University of Miskolc, Hungary, 2007: 53)

Our translation into English of fragment (b) quoted in German:

Abstract. The present day situation in the metalworking industry is characterized through productive and cost-minimizing diversification. ...

Keywords: development of machine tools, cutting geometry, round shank

If intertextuality bridges between the text and the dimensions of social context, social practice and discourse genre, then the examples above clearly illustrate how this phenomenon occurs. Fragment (a) is taken from an introduction to a research article, which gives some background information about the types of concepts discussed in the paper, clearly delineating the field of mechanics being tackled, through the use of words such as *mechanical systems, vibrations, kinematic and dynamic parameters*. All these make reference to discipline content, which is then processed by engineers and scientists, through the use of solutions which take us into the realm of applied mathematics (*algorhythms* are the steps taken to solve a specific problem, in this case implemented as software solutions). The descriptive nature of the fragment is given by the use of the present simple and the passive in the first part of the paragraph. The verb in the past makes reference to a collection of information that could exist as texts containing knowledge chunks useful in solving current problems. In conclusion, this piece of discourse refers to similar pieces of discourse, based on related knowledge content and also style and genre of a research article. All this information is shaped by the context where we find the description.

Fragment (b) functions in a similar manner, with internal and external data that help us construct the meaning of this chunk of text. In the case of fragment (a), the use of the English language is also an element to be taken into consideration, as it has become a requirement when publishing research data in our country. In comparison, fragment (b) is published in the German language – a widespread language, especially in the field of Science and Technology. At the same time, German is an official language of the European Union. The genre of research article is hinted at by the use of such elements as the words *abstract* and *keywords*. These are generally accepted requirements in the structure of scholarly articles. In this case, a mode of communication is applied that is typical for a variety of discourse – publication in a scientific bulletin.

A clever organization of any document ensures the clarity of the message for the reader and translator. This is a requirement for any audience, especially for people who are engaged in professional activities and have little time to read. Moreover, due to the increase in informational content, by open access to such resources as the Internet, our society has opened doors to any type of knowledge. Translators mediate between the holders of knowledge coming from different backgrounds. It is the role of the translator to shape meanings within socially and culturally accepted norms.

Culture and ethics

Translation and interpretation have consequences and so involve ethics. Some choices translators make need to be guided by ethical considerations and by concerns with effectiveness and customer satisfaction. A global society creates some cross-cultural similarities and certain universal ethical principles that are held by cultures, such as the respect for another's dignity, the right to confidentiality, etc. There are situations when translators and interpreters have to keep secrets and need to ask themselves about the consequences of their actions depending on the circumstances. They have ethical obligations. In Romania and Moldova, there are authorized translations – work performed by translators authorized either by the Romanian Ministry of Justice or by academic qualification recognized by the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Turkey, translators are required to take an oath before the notary public and thus their work becomes legally recognized. Though there are a number of international standards issued by various authorities in different European countries as well as in the USA, Australia, Canada, the question of quality and ethics in translation is still somewhat blurry in our country. In terms of ethics, translators and interpreters in Romania are under an obligation to keep secrets, possibly under these circumstances: when you promise to keep information hidden, as in an agreement of confidentiality that is usually requested by the party that hires a translator/an interpreter and when a translator and interpreter would invade the privacy to which everyone has a right, to reveal information that no one else has the right to know. This is especially unethical when such disclosures can hurt the individual involved.

Conclusions

Everyday human life, behaviour, and beliefs are continually transforming, and translators need to adapt to the new emerging patterns. Traditional social life, although largely ritualized, generates a creation, an innovation. Any tradition allows a certain degree of freedom, of improvisation, a part open to the genius of an occasional actor. These personal contributions are not just unconscious variations, because such small changes actually stand for the differences of the copies from their original models. Individual creativity seems to have been a laborious activity for a long time. The majority of specialized forms of production used to imply a number of symbolic duties, standing for modes of actualizing and amplifying the imaginary. Most social productions are reflected in the discourses of those communities.

Within the human sciences, analysis is directed not to 'life, labour and language' in their most transparent state but to representations of human existence in all

its diverse forms, through which it is lived, (re-)produced, and experienced. In consequence, for the human sciences, representation constitutes both their object domain and the general pedestal of that form of knowledge, the basis that makes it possible. Symbolic exchange is therefore radically opposed to the abstraction of economic and sign exchange. It is open-ended and it does not accumulate meanings (or profits) or alienate, because it does not split people from their identity or their social place by inserting them into the system of objects.

Humans build mental representations of the world on the basis of innate mental structures and perceptual experience. The categories and content of discourses are seen as a reflection, influenced by various errors and distortions, of how the world is perceived to be. Both reality and mind are constructed by people conceptually in language while they perform different tasks. This makes it necessary to analyse the natural interaction or textual materials produced as part of life's activities rather than using experiments, surveys and interviews to generate research data. Translation is not only an outcome of mental states and cognitive processes but a domain of action.

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