

TRANSLATION AND AGENCY – A KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANISATION**Ana-Magdalena PETRARU****“Al. I. Cuza” University, Iași, Romania
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Abstract: *This paper purports to give an overview of translators as agents and their agency which should be viewed as a knowledge-based organisation in today's globalized world. In our approach we will draw on Translation Studies (Baker and Saldanha, 2009), in general, and the situation of the profession in Romania with its recent developments, in particular (namely the proposal for a new controversial law which all legal translators and their agencies should obey). Last but not least, our aim is to account for translators as agents and translation agency in our country in the context of ethical practice and the increasingly stressful, demanding challenges of the job which is constantly frowned upon by the general public in the era of google translation.*

Key words: TS, translation agency, agents in translating, ethical practice, translation in Romania

1. Introduction

There have always been endless complaints on the low, second-hand status of translators as mediating agents between languages and cultures and their low pay which is undeserved, if we were to consider them not just traitors in the good tradition inspired by the Italian adage *traduttore traditore*, but hard workers. In this sense, as far as the state of the art in our country is concerned, it suffice to recall the communist perspective of the participants to the National Colloquium on Translation and World Literature (1981), i.e. reputed Romanian philologists such as Leon Levițchi, Andrei Bănăș, Petre Solomon, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Al. Paleologu, Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga and others that pleaded for the replacement of the adage with *traduttore truditore*, thus properly acknowledging the translator's Herculean task [1].

With respect to post-communist Romania, things have not changed much; to support our argument, it is enough to bring into play the debate of young Romanian translators (e.g.: Andra Matzal, Radu Pavel Gheo,

Mihai Chirilov) in *Suplimentul de cultură* (2007) who deplore the status of translations and their agents in an era in which penetrating the market is easy, particularly as a translator from English. This owes to a higher and higher demand that softens the selection process (even renowned publishers such as Polirom hire translators based on a translation test), thus leading to an increasing number of poor translations; moreover, the low pay only allows translators to do their work as a hobby, in their free time, along with a job or their studies [2]. As the renowned translator from French social sciences Bogdan Ghiu puts it, this situation is a feature of Easter European countries, whereas France and Norway lie at the opposite pole; people believe (and are encouraged to do so), that translation is unimportant, 'minor' and 'automatic', 'self-made'; furthermore, translators and translations mean nothing to the public that cannot proceed to a mental representation of the agents and their craft.

The translator has already been replaced by either companies, namely translation ‘agencies’ (as in the case of film subtitling and dubbing) or the internet and its facilities: translation programmes, websites, google translate, hence the pressure exerted on translators and implications on the quality of translations. It is recommended that translators be financially supported by the state so the isolation and the exploitation against them stop, especially in the case of small cultures and rare languages such as ours [3, *passim*].

2. Agents and Agency in Translation (Studies)

In our approach, we draw on John Milton and Paul Bandia’s view of translators as agents who are deemed to be in charge of important innovations and changes in literature, history and culture, i.e. being more than “text producers, mediators who modify the text such as those who produce abstracts, editors, revisers and translators, commissioners and publishers” [4] that hold “an intermediary position between a translator and an end user of a translation” as advocated by Juan Sager and quoted by Mark Shuttleworth in his *Dictionary of Translation Studies* [*apud* 4]. So, building on the definition above, translators are included amongst agents, and they may as well be “magazines, journals or institutions, (...) patrons of literature, Maecenas, salon organizers, politicians or companies which help to change cultural and linguistic policies” [*ibidem*].

In Translation Studies, agency is considered to be something individual pertaining to the translator as agent and is brought into play when criticising Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and its aim to set up translation laws, a ‘positivist chimera’, as Tymoczko (1988) puts it [*apud* 4] because it neglects individual situations encountered when translating. Moreover, agency becomes problematic when postcolonial approaches are discussed due to its location “at the interface between the colonizer and the colonized” [5]. Interpreting studies also tackle the interpreter’s subjective agency in

an ideological context [*cf.* Daniel Gile’s article on *Conference interpreting, sociocultural perspectives* in 5].

Agency is revisited in the context of ethical practice, particularly by Anthony Pym (2001) against the background of the “resurgent interest to a widening of the parameters of translation to include it and to a move within the discipline away from the dominance of the descriptivist paradigm towards globalizing trends that demand increased attention to processes of crosscultural communication.” [*apud* 5] Other uses of agency are related to translation and travel, citizenship and participatory action in Cronin’s ‘microcosmopolitan transnationalism’ (2000, 2003) when referring to translation and globalization or the small impact that translators’ agency had in history and the attempt to make a difference in the target text which corresponds to “the endeavours of ‘ordinary’ people simply going about their everyday business, trying to preserve their moral integrity as well as character and circumstances permit”. [5]

The term in its organisational acception is employed when dealing with computer-aided translation (CAT) and its tools, whose importance can no longer be denied in the era of globalisation since they afford a greater flexibility for translations and their translation agencies when dealing with various customers and projects, localization ones included [5].

3. Translation and Agency in Romania

In our research we consider agency in both its dictionary meanings [6] outlined above, i.e. the translators’ agency as their instrumentality or mode of acting and as business that employs agents. Regarding their instrumentality, we could argue that, at least in post-communist Romania, translators via their organisations succeeded in passing on knowledge from expert to lay, introducing some theoretical TS concepts to their potential clients. Thus, as already discussed in our previous research [7], this is the case of translation agencies such as Loredana Peter’s who lists the distinction

between translation categories made by Roman Jakobson in 1959: intralingual (translation within the same language); interlingual (translation from one language into another one) and intersemiotic (translation from verbal signs into non-verbal signs). Other TS-related concepts such as localization and adaptation are also explained (e.g. Alexandru I. Laura Gabriela, an Italian translator who, on the website of her translation agency, argues that socio-cultural references are likely to change when texts are rendered into Swiss Italian and not standard Italian, *apud* [7]).

The situation of the profession has been challenged lately because of a new law that all legal translators and interpreters authorised by the Romanian Ministry of Justice should obey. They are supposed to be ruled by a Union and the services of any other organisation or translation agency would no longer be acknowledged. [8] The project was submitted for public debate between January the 1st and February the 2nd, 2015. There was also an important debate on March 25, 2015 and its participants (from the Ministry of Justice, reputed Romanian translation associations such as AFIT or UNTAR and representatives of the National Union of Notaries Public) all argued against it. The parties to the debate required further clarification on the possibility of translators and interpreters to work with customers not only via notaries, but also independently, the need to legalise the signature of the legal interpreter and translator by the notary public, the need to define the notions of legal translations and other types of translations and the status of non-legal translations. Both the representatives of the National Union of Notaries Public and the ones of the Ministry of Justice considered that it was best for the translators' signature to be further certified by the notary because of the problems that might arise from the former's insufficient knowledge of certain judicial aspects. There were also complaints about the poor quality of some translations and proposals were made for mixed

commissions to be founded to draft the final law and conduct a study to assess its likely impact. A representative of The Faculty of Modern Applied Languages from Babeş-Bolyai University spoke about the availability of the institution to contribute to the training of the legal translators and interpreters which was not sufficiently developed in the provisions of the law under debate. Among other proposals, the following are worth mentioning: evaluation on regular basis should be replaced by continuing professional development; the possibility to exert the profession of legal translator in translation agencies and other organizations should be kept; last but not least, legal translators and interpreters should be allowed to work with other entities outside the ones financed from the state budget [8, *passim*].

The law is definitely a controversial one and voices on forums of professional associations, websites such as proz.com and media in general argue that further restrictions would be imposed on translators; thus, they would be forced to either give up their certificate of certified translators acquired from the Ministry of Justice in our country or opt for a new career because of the pay which would only become lower if the new legal framework did not allow them to exert other profession. Ethical boundaries would also be challenged, some admitting that they would push the limit by refusing as much work from state organizations as possible if they were allowed to make a profit otherwise, i.e. working as non-legal translators for various private companies or organizations.

4. Conclusions

In our research, we showed that Romanian reflections on the agency of translation have been present ever since the communist years in organizational forms (i.e. at the National Colloquium of Translations and World Literature in 1981); however, after 1989 and especially in the new millennium they go beyond professional circles as they are made known to the public via

translation agencies or organizations that share TS knowledge as expert to lay when they advertise their services. Unfortunately, we are encouraged to believe that translation is a second-hand job, and translation programmes nowadays, google translate included, do not help [3]. Even Romanian laws [8] are designed to impose further restrictions on translation agency in all its acceptations, thus challenging professionals to force themselves outside

ethical boundaries by giving up their certificate from the Ministry of Justice or refusing work that requires it.

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