

Translation as a Means of Communication in a Multicultural World

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Abstract. Translations are of common interest, as they imply communication between people of different languages. Nowadays, more often than not, everywhere we go, we get in contact with foreigners and interpreting or translation is the means by which we communicate with them, if we cannot speak the same language. The multicultural world we live in brings new challenges for the translator giving him/her several possibilities of offering a reliable translation. This paper intends to underline the main problem/solution situations that a translator could encounter in this multicultural world.

Keywords: translator, translation, ethic, communication, message, solution

1. Introduction

Lately the meaning and the means of **Communication** have changed dramatically, and **translators** have found themselves moving in a new direction, adapting their goals and professional vision to reflect the coming of age of a new global community.

Because today's technology makes everyday communication between cultures commonplace, a translator no longer thinks of himself/herself as just an isolated translator, but as a global ambassador offering his /her services to an ever-increasing market.

As we watch, and as the world slowly becomes globalized as more cultures strive to communicate with each other, translators realize how much the need for translation is increasing. More and more, we must not only be able to communicate in the other languages, but also have an understanding of the cultural context, of those we deal with in order for our businesses to succeed. Even as we become savvier as both employees and consumers, the translations must be seamless in our native language or the message will fail - whether it is an advertisement for a multibillion dollar corporation or a presentation to employees on their new safety program.

For a real professional, translation is an art firstly, and then the translator can take it up as a craft. The art of translation is not an easy one, because it demands many skills and the translator has the responsibility of conveying the original message into the target language so that the reader cannot sense the difference between the original and the translation, but to read it as if it were the original.

2. Translation=Problems=Solutions=Successful Communication

It is without a doubt admitted that the translation process involves losses: the ideology of translation techniques also aims at “inventorying” the theoretical impossibility of translating – seen as an exact reproduction of the original – by promoting certain strategies of limiting the losses, classified as secondary, collateral and therefore acceptable, if the process of translating is centered on producing an equivalent target-text, able to recompose the dominant function of the source-text.

Ideally and theoretically, the conformation of a translation is not made according to the original text, but with its target, and the translator must unveil this target in order to select only those translation strategies that come from the way of classifying the text to be translated. “The fidelity/treachery rate, which along the years was the subject of many writings and brought many translators on the edge of desperation, sometimes pushing them up to craziness, is now de-dramatized by an operation of removal. Fidelity does no longer tie

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directly the original text to the target-text, and treason is justified by translation strategies that no longer impose compulsory conformity with it.”¹

The issue, which we ought to start from, is that the type of speaking can only be achieved within languages. It only achieves its universal potentials in systems differentiated phonologically, lexically, syntactically, and stylistically. However, languages do not represent closed systems that exclude communication. If it were so, the same difference would exist between linguistic groups as the one that exists on the biological plan, among the living species. The fact that there is only one human being is explained especially through the fact that sense transfers are possible from one language to another, in short, through what we can translate.

What does it mean that we can translate? This possibility or this capacity is not verified only by the fact that we can effectively translate discourses and text from one language into another, without any semantic loss totally damaging and especially absolutely irreparable. The possibility of translating is posted at a fundamental level, as a condition for communicating in the multicultural environment that we live in.

Translating involves **the existence of bilingual persons**, namely, of some living mediators; then, it consists of searching for the best possible connection between the resources of the target language and those of the source language. However, what traductology really needs, is culture-to culture translators, cultural bilinguals, able to accompany this operation of transfer in the mental universe of the other language, in its total respect of habits, fundamental beliefs. “In this respect we can speak about an ethos of translation, whose aim is that of repeating the act of linguistic hospitality in the cultural and spiritual field.”²

The process of translation establishes **a relationship between two partners, the foreigner** – term that includes the work, the author, his/her language – and **the reader of the translated work**. Between them there is **the translator**, the one who conveys, eases the passage of the whole message from one idiom into another. One could say that translating means serving two masters: you serve the foreigner and his work, but you also serve the reader, in his desire of appropriating it. Thus, having a transmitter (the foreigner), a message, the receiver (the reader of the message) and the means (the translator) we actually described the basic theory of what communication means.

As in the theory of communication, there are also some “disturbances”, which try to interfere with the conveyance of the message. Hence, we can say that the translator faces a resistance towards the work of translating in different stages of his work. He or she meets it before beginning to translate, in the shape of the non-translatability titles or headlines, which inhibits him or her before beginning his or her work. Sometimes even the fear of a non-experienced or even experienced translator can inhibit him/her from having a powerful beginning.

All along the years there have been several scholars, philosophers and professional translators who have all had the same concerns, such as the possibilities and the impossibilities of translating and the fidelity of translations.

An argument against translatability is that of **the lack of symmetry** between languages, both concerning synonym series and of semantic fields. Moreover, there is the category of untranslatable terms, related to a specific geographic, historic, social-cultural experience, and they represent translators’ touchstones. In this category we can include “**spațiu mioritic**” (Romanian), “**understatement**” (English). Furthermore, the poetic discourse, which makes ample use of connotations, has been used as a frequent example in supporting untranslatability.

One central problem of the traditional translation discourse is that of **fidelity** either to the spirit or to the letter. This issue has been a very debated one and European histories of translation provide many examples of historical periods, translation schools and outstanding scholars that favored one direction or another. The “**word for word**” translation has always fought against the “**meaning for meaning**” translation. Even nowadays, when we open the Internet browser we can see that Google translator, namely the “word for

¹ Douglas Robinson - **Becoming a Translator. An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Translation**, Second Edition, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 30.

² *** - **Getting Started: A Newcomer’s Guide to Translation and Interpretation**, Alexandria, American Translators Association, 2001, p. 42.

word” translation is having a powerful fight with the persons who actually learned a foreign language and try to give the meaning of the message. Along our research we have come upon many persons who told us that they could speak 65 languages. After a few moments of amazement, we realised that that was the number of languages that Google translate offers in Romania. Who could blame them? It is a hands on means of communication that permits to everybody to communicate in whatever language, however, using just word for word translation. As it became a real trend in Romania, a further research is needed in order to establish if this is better than admitting that one does not speak any foreign language.

It is never possible to tell that a translation is good before comparing it with the original. How can a person say this if he/she is not bilingual? Some translations are so well written that they earn applause from critics too lazy or too ignorant to compare them with the original. Careful comparison, however, will show they are all wrong: the person who wrote the original simply had not said that, or meant something different. The French found a definition for them - **belles infidèles**, (unfaithful beauties). Contrary to the general belief, and according to our research, this is more often the case when the translation is done by an **expert**, namely someone who works in the area, and not by a professional translator. In order to support this we analysed the translation of a medical text done by an doctor who spoke a foreign language and who felt entitled to tamper with the original just a little bit. Whereas, a professional translator will stick to the original translating without altering the message, as he/she does not have a medical knowledge.

Most people working in translation are more familiar with the ethics of “doing” as opposed to the ethics of “not doing”. The translator working in a professional way and environment, will attempt to produce that faithful mirror-image in the target language of all the twists and turns, the subtle nuances of the source text, and, having completed the final product, with a personal murmur ranging from a “not bad at all” to a “quite well done”, will dispatch the item to the client. Moreover, apart from the “doing” of a translation, the translator can at times be faced with a dilemma: to translate or not to translate at all, to accept the translation or not to accept it, is the translator good enough in that range of vocabulary or not.

Another ethical consideration of the process of translation is **conscience**. Each individual translator is gifted with the presence of a personal conscience, which many describe as the greatest subjective indicator any person possesses. According to our belief, conscience is the maturing of the mind, educated by environment, by family, by professional training and even to a certain extent by intuition. If the text to be translated offends conscience, then the translator would probably refuse to translate it, thus, another “disturbance” interferes with the message being transmitted.

As aforementioned, the translator may then hold to a **number of personal principles**, first among which might be, not to translate outside one’s own area of competence or expertise. The translator may be a gifted translator of computer software texts, but not have a clue on pharmaceutical texts. There are some translators who admit that the message they could transmit could be an altered one, hence altering the communication. Some consider this courage while others believe it is cowardice and personal stagnation.

We often meet translators claiming proficiency or efficacy in translating into a particular language mainly on the basis of it being their mother tongue and not vice versa, from their mother tongue into a foreign language. Similarly very often companies look for native speakers of the target language for translation. The general belief appears to be that native speakers are good translators into their native language. A contemporary writer states that “Wenn man sich in eigener Muttersprache richtig und gewählt ausdrücken kann, dann kann man auch eine Fremdsprache richtig erlernen und übersetzen.”³ (When someone can speak correctly his/her mother tongue it is easier to learn a foreign language and to translate from/into it.) Could this be the answer to all the concerns the translators had before?

Being a mental activity, the purpose of which is to transpose literary, scientific and technical texts from one language into another, translation imposes those who perform it certain obligations that spread from its own nature. The translator is the only one responsible for the translation, whatever the relationships or the agreement that tie him or her to the persons or institutions that use the translation. The translator should hold responsibility for his/her words, as he/she becomes a transmitter/creator of a message. The huge

³ Rodica, Teodora, Biriş, **Denglich – eine Umgangssprache?**, Studii de Ştiinţă şi Cultură, (Science and Culture Studies) “Vasile Goldiș” University Press Arad, December, 2011, ISSN 1841-1401 (print), ISSN 2067-5135 (online), , pp 134

responsibility should be taken and acknowledged and not until a translator is ready should he/she begin a translation. The translator should refuse to give the text interpretations with which he or she does not agree or which are in contradiction with his or her professional obligations. A translation should be accurate and reproduce the form of the original. Respecting this accuracy is **a juridical and moral obligation** of the translator.

Still, the accurate translation is not to be mistaken for literal translation, as accuracy does not exclude certain necessary changes, the aim of whom is to reproduce into another language and for another country the form, the atmosphere and the inner sense of the writing. Furthermore, the translator must possess a deep knowledge about the culture of the languages he or she works with. Undertaking research from a literary/cultural perspective has been fundamental both for contextualizing and empowering translation. While examining translated text scholars could account for ideological factors and specific norms that had an impact on translator's activity at various times in history. On the other hand, translations could be perceived as factors of cultural change and progress wielding the power to shape strong images of cultures, texts and authors and to construct cultural identities. Thus, special attention should be given to this aspect.

Nowadays, translation studies regard culture as the start of "problematisation": **"Culture no longer offers itself a unifying force; nation, language, culture no longer line up as bounded and congruent realities. Writing across languages, writing through translation becomes a particularly strong form of expression at a time when national cultures have themselves become diverse, inhabited by plurality."**⁴

Cultural plurality, which includes ethnic and women sub-cultures, as well as the hegemonic relations between the former colonizers and their colonized, has given rise, among other things, to **specific translation strategies** through which cultural difference is highlighted and minorities empowered. The products of such strategies are hybrid texts, sites of conflict between cultures, languages and codes.

The idea of equating cultures with nations and monolingual territories no longer corresponds to present-day processes of internationalized mass communication and globalization in which cultural and state boundaries are often transgressed. Consequently, there are many ways in which translation is present in this transcultural communication: advertisements, translations of EU documents, international finance, and fashion.

Moreover, "a **"translation culture"** has been adopted, referring to a set of norms, conventions and expectations that represent the behaviour of all interactants in the field of translation."⁵

The relationship between culture and translation has taken extremely complex forms in contemporary Translation Studies. The concept of translation became transformed nowadays in such a way in order to make room for the concept of plurality and difference and it tries to adjust and change in order to fit in this multicultural, intercultural and transcultural environment that we live in.

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