

The Complex Facets of Interpreting Competence

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Abstract. The purpose of the present paper is to convey a new perspective over the concept of translation which has often been regarded as a process of taking a source text in one language and producing an equivalent text, the target text, in another language. It explores the different types of translations and the problems interpreters may come across. The paper offers solutions and emphasizes useful methods for facing such linguistic problems. Regarded as a branch of translation, interpreting has been analyzed from two points of view: community interpreting and conference interpreting. Considering the fact that the source text is produced in one socio-cultural context and will be read in a different socio-cultural context, the question of faithfulness, equivalence, accuracy and translatability emerges. The outcome or the consequence of the interpreting act is what eventually matters, and therefore, the paper analyses and sets forth methods useful for developing the interpreter's ability to render accurately the content, meaning or style of the original text, considering, at the same time, the aspects of literal and free translation.

Key words: Translation, Interpreting, Community, Conferences, Source, Target language, Equivalence.

1. Introduction

The notion of translation is generally accepted as being the transfer of a message from one language into another or more precisely from a source-language into a target-language. The translation theory refers to hypotheses, beliefs, concepts, focusing on the relationship between thought, meaning and language. The interpreting process, on the other hand, is a branch of translations, referring to a conversion process from one language into another in a spoken manner. Along the centuries, the idea of translating evolved from word-for-word to sense-for-sense approaches. If in the beginning people were more concerned about replacing one word in the source-language text with another in the target-language text, later on, they showed greater interest in the sense-for-sense approach, that is, in preserving the meaning of the source-language text. Linguists began to adapt cultural references that do not exist in the target-language in order to achieve naturalness. They also formulated several definitions. “Translation is a process by which a spoken or written utterance takes place in one language which is intended and presumed to convey the same meaning as a previously existing utterance in another language.” [1] “In translation it is always necessary to aim at equivalence of pragmatic meaning, if necessary at the expense of semantic equivalence. Pragmatic meaning thus overrides semantic meaning. We may therefore consider a translation to be primarily a pragmatic reconstruction of its source text.” [2] “Interpreting is a form of Translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced on the basis of a one-time presentation of an utterance in a source language.” [3] The above-mentioned definitions highlight the idea that translations try to preserve the original meaning in order to make the reader understand that he is dealing with a faithful representation of the original text. The aim of translations is to obtain a pragmatic equivalence, which is concerned with the meaning of utterances in context, rather than a semantic one which refers exactly to the opposite. When being involved in such a process it is important to be aware of the communicative intention and of the relationship between the participants. „Wenn man sich in eigener Muttersprache richtig und gewählt ausdrücken kann, dann kann man auch eine Fremdsprache richtig erlernen und übersetzen.“ („If one properly masters one's mother tongue, one can accurately translate and learn a foreign language“). [4] Some language experts consider that it is not always necessary to stick to the original; they suggest that the translator can create his own version of the source text. When interpreting, an utterance that is heard only once is translated into the target-language without the possibility of editing it after it has been uttered. Therefore, considering the previous definitions the reader may notice that there are no rules regarding the faithfulness of a translation: some say this concept is not so important, disregarding the source text, while others claim that it is essential for the process, because one should be as literal as possible to the original. As a consequence of such different opinions emerged the concept of equivalence and the signification of a number of factors that interfere with the translation process such as: the type of text, the purpose of the translation and the circumstances in which

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it occurs. This concept of equivalence previously mentioned is determined by these norms or factors and it is useful to describe the goal of a translation. Writers like Catford, Nida or House distinguished several types of equivalence: formal, textual, dynamic, semantic and pragmatic which contribute to the process of achieving the optimum product. It has often been claimed that interpreters do not merely translate from one language into another; their task is much more difficult than that as they have to persuade, explain or even lie on behalf of others. Translations should not be regarded as a word-matching exercise because they represent the idea or opinion of someone else. If compared to a speech act, (even if there are some similarities), translations are intended to achieve relevance not only communication. When taking into account the concept of equivalence in an attempt to match the original speaker's intentions, the interpreter should resort to a dialogical interaction as it involves more than one person. Each turn in a dialogue is produced by one speaker who wants to convey some meaning reflected in the translation. A target text can never be equivalent, faithful and accurate, at all levels with the source text. In order to provide a literal translation, one should understand the meaning and the speaker's intentions, considering at the same time the circumstances, the cultural conventions and the persons involved and assessing their likely reactions. After having listened to and analyzed the speech, the interpreter's concern should be to find a solution to convey the speaker's meaning and intentions into the target language so as to obtain a proper reaction from the listeners. The interpreter's understanding of the original intention will be subjective due to his familiarity with the language and culture in question.

2. An overall framework of translation and interpreting

There are both similarities and differences between the two processes. First of all translations are expressed in written form, while, on the other hand interpretations are expressed in oral form. Translators can take time to read, analyze and understand the text. However, there are several types of texts such as technical, medical or literary which require different amounts of research. For some of them the translator needs a special kind of preparation, an analysis of parallel texts in the other language; he has to compare styles and terminology. Before drawing up the final version, he will produce a number of drafts. There are numerous resources a translator needs, such as translation software packages, dictionaries or other devices that complement his long-term memory.

For interpreters the situation is more difficult as they have no time to analyze texts and make use of any references. Their single aid is their memory and their general knowledge in different areas of social life. Usually, they are provided with some material to read before interpreting in a conference or on any other occasion. If comparing conference interpreting with community interpreting we notice that in the latter situation translators are provided with very little information about the topic to be discussed either for reasons of confidentiality or because of insufficient knowledge. In a first visit to a lawyer for example, the translator will know nothing about the purpose of the visit. Community interpreters should possess information related to the social and institutional setting in which they work. They must be able to deal with new texts all the time, developing thus the ability to comprehend all sorts of texts and gain experience in different situations. Unlike the interpreter, the translator can assess the readership and adapt the translation to the audience. There are many translations which require a cultural adaptation in order to be intelligible in another language, by restructuring the text, using images, adding and omitting paragraphs. An example in this respect would be the field of advertising or the translation of community brochures which might require the translator to improve on their expression and clarity. On the other hand, there are legal translations which involve the use of specialized terms any adaptation being excluded. Therefore, broadly speaking, translation is target-audience oriented while interpreting is source text-oriented.

Simultaneous and consecutive interpreting requires text condensing procedures like the omission of non-content features (hesitations, repetitions). According to Sandra Beatriz Hale, there are several interpreting modes used in different contexts. The first one is simultaneous interpreting with use of equipment. In this situation the interpreter uses headphones to listen and to interpret a few seconds after the commencement of each utterance. It is typical for conferences. The second mode is known as simultaneous whispering, without any equipment and is basically used in courtrooms, medical settings. The third situation, the long consecutive interpreting, occurs when the speaker delivers five-minute fragments of speech and meanwhile, the interpreter takes notes. Then, the interpreter renders the message corresponding to each segment of speech in turn, in the target language. This mode is generally efficient in small conferences or informal meetings. And finally, the author mentioned the dialogue, or the so-called short consecutive interpreting, when the interpreter interprets the dialogue between two people who speak different languages. With this mode, each turn is relatively short and is often used in interviews. This method is source speaker-oriented

because it gives the interpreter the possibility to interact with people, to clarify misunderstandings and mistakes, to help them communicate with each other by removing the language barriers. Translators or simultaneous interpreters on the other hand are deprived of such privileges because they have no contact with the author of the text, or because they work in a booth. The dialogue interpreter's aim is to obtain the same reaction in the listener, as the original would have. Markers of register variation, hesitations or repetitions are essential in revealing the speaker's attitudes, social and educational level. Therefore, if the interpreter manages to preserve such features, the speakers will be given an original rendition of the message. In certain environments such as the medical or juridical one, it is fundamental to preserve the stylistic features of the utterance because of their importance for the clarity of a testimony presented or for establishing a patient's diagnosis. As in interpreting, texts are presented on fragments, it would be impossible for the interpreter to change an oral text in the same manner a translator can.

Similar to dialogue interpreting are the translations of literary texts where the dialogues between characters should be rendered as faithfully as possible in order to preserve their individual styles and voices. Translations of literary dialogues are static, unlike the mode discussed above, where the dialogue is dynamic, involving three participants. "In a dialogue, each turn from one speaker will prompt a response or a reaction from the other speaker. In a dialogue interpreting situation, each turn is processed through the interpreter, who, even when attempting to be fully accurate to the original, is a different person from the other interlocutors and will inevitably bring to the interaction his or her own person – a third participant. Different interpreters will produce different renditions, choosing different words, different syntax, different nuances, which may trigger different reactions in the participants, the significance of which is yet to be determined." [5] There are situations when having to interpret and the interpreter does not know the context of the utterance. As a consequence, the rendition might be misunderstood and several interpreters will provide different interpretations. If the interpreter is not well informed and well prepared there is the risk of failing to provide equivalent renditions, affecting the pragmatics of the speakers and modifying their relationship. Therefore, the most important task of the interpreter is to reduce as much as possible the differences between the original and the translated message. Sandra Beatriz Hale compared the interpreters with some actors. In the same way actors interpret roles trying to stick to the script but imprinting their original style as well, interpreters convey the message according to their personal understanding. They both have to be aware of the topic, author, setting in order to better understand the source text. Linguists identified two types of translations called sight translations and subtitling. In the first situation interpreters are given a written text and they have to interpret it orally in the target language. With subtitling, the situation is the other way round. Interpreters are provided with an oral text and they have to translate it in writing. They also have the opportunity to use references and dictionaries even if they must comply with the number of characters that are allowed per caption.

3. The interpreting process a matter of comprehension, conversion and delivery

Studies have shown that no two people can understand the same words in the same way because no two languages can represent the same social reality. As the meanings of texts cannot be transferred across languages, the translations obtained are merely reinterpretations of the original. The interpreting process requires not only a good knowledge of the respective language but of the country's culture as well. Therefore, comprehension depends on the informational background of the interpreter. Paraphrasing Grice, a cooperative principle emerges in a conversation, which means that both parties involved have the responsibility to ease the comprehension. According to the above-mentioned author, this principle is focused on quantity, quality, relevance and manner. The role of the interpreter is crucial in order to avoid misunderstandings. These occur even between speakers of the same language, and therefore the more different two cultures are, the greater the danger of misinterpretation. The interpreter should share a common ground with both speakers, mediating the communicational process between the two. The sources of misunderstandings have been divided into two categories: "[...] those that are discourse-internal and those that are discourse-external. Bazzanella and Damiano's propose a taxonomy of discourse-internal sources of misunderstanding which includes all levels of language, from the phonetic to the pragmatic. This implies that there is potential for misunderstanding in any part of the discourse: incorrect pronunciation, an unknown lexical item, a marked syntactic order, an incoherent utterance, an indirect speech act or pragmatic implicature – all can be sources of misunderstanding which are expressed through the discourse. However, background knowledge of the topic, shared knowledge with the speaker and contextual cues will greatly determine whether the hearer understands the discourse or not." [6] In order to avoid such understandings both the interpreter and the speaker should make some efforts. The speaker must be coherent and

unambiguous, paying also attention to the interpreter's needs. The interpreter, on the other hand, must understand the social roles of the participants, the context, the setting, the cultural background and the subject matter and the technical jargon, as it is not enough to know the two languages very well. In case the speaker is incoherent in what he says, the interpreter's role is not to correct or to make the speech intelligible, but to maintain the incoherence and to convey exactly the same information from the utterance.

In the interpreting process, the text goes through a conversion phase, when the interpreter decides what strategy to adopt to convey the message as faithfully as possible. This time interval is very short and the interpreter cannot contemplate the choices; he has to rely on natural intuition and informed study. According to Hale, the factors involved in this process are a good knowledge of the target language (grammar, lexicon and registers), interpreting skills and a theoretical underpinning approach. By interpreting skills, we understand the ability to transpose the message into another language – ability that can be achieved through many years of practice. Such skills include: mastery of the modes of interpreting previously mentioned, knowing when and how to interrupt, making choices under pressure, using the long and short-term memory. There are persons who lack such skills – they understand what is being said to them but cannot convert the utterance into the target language. Literal renditions are not recommended because matching every word in the same order would lead to a total lack of meaning. The translation should be performed at the sentence level, taking into account the semantic factors. In some circumstances, because of the demand to translate literally, interpreters often renounce to conveying pragmatic implicature. In courtrooms for example, interpreters deliver the message according to what comes to their mind first and not according to what the lawyers tell them. The most important thing for them is to be well trained, prepared and experienced so as to get closer to the original. In Denmark for example, even if the code of ethics requires interpreters to translate verbatim, they choose to interpret pragmatically. When interpreters are insecure, they will provide translations that are syntactically and semantically close to the source message.

The interpreting process also involves a delivery phase which depends on the mode and purpose of the interaction. If we are to consider the five types of interpreting, that is simultaneous, whispering simultaneous into minority language, long consecutive translation, short consecutive translation and whispering simultaneous into mainstream language, we shall notice that their focus is different. The first three types underline the importance of the propositional content while the last two are more concerned with the content and style of speech. Whispering simultaneous into minority language and mainstream language are two interpreting styles that differ according to the aim of the two activities, be it about a trial in a court of law or about a diagnosis set in a health institution. Further on, such examples lead the reader into the sphere of community interpreting which is a complex process that goes down into the most intimate corners of a person's life.

4. Role and responsibilities of community and conference interpreting

Community interpreting is not focused on conferences; it deals with everyday problems of the individuals which occur either in a doctor's surgery or in a lawyer's office, a police station. Thus, interpreters get to know confidential matters and therefore, it is fundamental for them to ensure accuracy and impartiality. Some people are reluctant about allowing strangers into private issues and here comes up the professional code of ethics interpreters have to abide by. Community interpreters have a huge responsibility as sometimes, a person's life depends on their ability to communicate. It is much more important than conference interpreting due to its social significance. It is paramount for the interpreter to be competent as he or she represents a crucial link between the two interlocutors. Linguists consider that a person's life may depend on an accurate rendition, and therefore, in order to diminish the risks involved, there should be high standards imposed to those who want to embark upon such a demanding task. Unfortunately, there are no precise rules for this job, in any of the schools around the world because many undermined the necessity of any formal requirements. Specialists consider that community interpreting cannot be regarded as a separate area of interpreting but as a multilingual welfare work. They say it is a mixture between interpreting and social work, claiming that the status of the persons involved influences the status of the interpreter. It has been and still is wrongly assumed that if the individuals soliciting the help of an interpreter belong to a lower social category, such as refugees or other powerless participants, the status of the interpreter is less elevated if compared to the status of the conference interpreter (who deals with international figures and personalities). To underline once more the ideas above-mentioned, Hale identifies some causes responsible for this situation. Firstly, we come across the disorganized state of the industry and the lack of such educational courses in the university. Secondly, people are not aware of the importance and complexity of the task. Even if classifications tend to weaken the profession of interpreter and they even lead to controversy related to the

activity, such views are often set forth by specialists in order to create a barrier between community interpreting and conference interpreting, or between court interpreters and ad hoc interpreters. Considering that the urge to categorize is innate in man, as Snell-Hornby stated, we identified several opinions of linguists who debated upon this matter. “Today, translator- and interpreter-mediated encounters vary tremendously in terms of their settings, modes, relationship among participants and other factors, posing a major challenge to the theory, practice and didactics of interpreting in particular.” [7] “...community interpreters provide services for residents of a community, as opposed to diplomats, conference delegates or professionals traveling abroad to conduct business.” [8] “In the most general sense, community interpreting refers to interpreting in institutional settings of a given society in which public service providers and individual clients do not speak the same language...community interpreting facilitates communication within a social entity (society) that includes culturally different sub-groups. Hence, the qualifier “community” refers to both the (mainstream) society as such as its constituent sub-community (ethnic or indigenous community, linguistic minority etc.)” [9] The most well-known classifications are the ones according to conference interpreting and community interpreting or simultaneous interpreting and consecutive interpreting. The features of these categories are underlined by context and situation. In some countries, community interpreting refers to unpaid interpreting, while in others it includes all types of interpreting except for conference interpreting. As mentioned above, the *actors* involved in the process define the character of the interpreting activity: there are the residents of a community (how they were called by Mikkelson) and the diplomats or international professionals. Other linguists preferred to focus on the setting rather than on the persons involved. Pöchhacker’s main concern is the institutions or public settings such as the police station or the courtrooms referring to both the mainstream and the minority communities. As there is not a single definition to suit all countries, the concept of community interpreting has been differently perceived around the world. If some consider that it occurs among the members of the same community (unlike conference interpreting which occurs among people belonging to different nationalities), others describe the interpreting types according to their setting.

To sum up, the main difference between conference interpreting and community interpreting is rendered by the fact that the first one is conducted in the simultaneous mode, while the latter one makes use of the consecutive mode. Then, there is the level of formality which situates conference interpreting into a more formal setting than the one of community interpreting (which, sometimes could be formal as well). Furthermore, Hale distinguished other differences: the register, the level of accuracy, the participants, the number of interpreters or the way each activity is perceived by the individuals and the interpreters. But nevertheless, the surveys conducted showed that the boundaries between the two types of interpreting are rather blurred, without a specific delineation. Many linguists claimed that community interpreting has a much greater significance than conference interpreting. Whereas in conferences the interpreter’s role is to help the participants understand the point they are trying to make with their papers, in community interpreting, people would definitely not be able to communicate or might even put their lives in danger but for the help of an accurate translation. Therefore, the pressure exercised on the interpreter is much greater in the second situation even if, financially speaking, their efforts are not rewarded according to their merits.

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