

# COMMUNICATION THROUGH TRANSLATION

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## *Abstract*

The present article analyses the strong relationship between communication, language and translation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can mention both the diversification of communication and the diversification of translation. The (r)evolution in the translation industry, similarly to machine translation and computer assisted translation – has had beneficial effect upon cultural translations as well in order to facilitate a more effective communication. Apparently *globalization* and *localization* are among the most important words nowadays, and our paper formulates the question whether *glocalization* may happen via translation to serve communication.

**Keywords:** (r)evolution in translation, globalization, localization, communication

## **Introduction**

Traditionally, the importance of communication has been long debated, either in ‘pure’ form (communication as such), or combined with other keywords, such as culture, globalization, effectiveness, etc. We would like to argue that translation, from the very beginning, has been a form of communicating thoughts among various cultures.

In our attempt to bring together communication and translation, we would like to start with Gadamer’s views, although we are aware that he did not think about communication as “passing of information from one person to another” but as “some subject matter” becoming “mutually accessible for two or more people” (Gadamer, 2004, Preface). He also stated that “invented systems of artificial communication are never languages. For artificial languages, such as secret languages or systems of mathematical symbols, have no basis in a community of language or life” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 443). He also added that our verbal world should not be conceived as a barrier to knowledge, but rather than something embracing everything, “always open to every possible insight”, although “language as language can be contrasted with every other act of communication (Gadamer, 2004, p. 551). At this point we should look into this relationship, as Han correctly observes: human preoccupation concerning globalization is a very acute problem of our times, as events taking place in one corner of the globe may affect half of the entire planet (Han, 2009). Culcer (1985) highlights the balance of the globalization process, stating that both positive and negative impacts should be considered, and why not focus on interaction between countries, possibilities to develop human civilization or familiarization of other peoples’ culture?

Seemingly, culture and civilization is impossible without communication and language, thus the next section tries to look into the relationship between them.

## Communication, language and translation

According to Cioran (1999, p. 21), Sieyès once said that only the drunk or crazy ones might think that anything can be expressed in any known language. Later on Cioran pays tribute to communication by admitting honestly that getting in touch with people exhausts him, and from this point of view it is incomprehensible how businessmen, politicians or merchants meet so many people without ‘dying at the oar’ (Cioran, 1999, p. 71).

It is not our primary aim to clarify the importance of communication on language (or vice versa), although countless books and articles have been written upon the topic. Translation studies often mention that language plays the major role in communication; however, this statement is rather controversial and seems subjective. We are certain that psychologists, sociologists or communication experts would give different definitions for communication (including gestures, mimics etc.) and we would like to quote Roy Harris, a distinguished linguist’s claim, according to which “communication precedes language” (Harris, 1978, cited in Anderman & Rogers, 2003, p. 89). If we accept this idea, than smaller ‘units’ of language (e.g. written text) are definitely ancillary to communication, and indeed, it is easy to observe that while devoting much time and money to ‘intercultural communication’, business experts (and even business anthropologists) are hardly interested in the language component (Lambert & Hermans, 2006, p. 161).

Nevertheless, in the age of multimedia multi-language business is thriving, and experts have already recognized the importance of localization in communication: web-pages, printed advertisements, product information all make use of language, and seem to recognize and apply Nida’s observation regarding Bible translations:

Since no two languages are identical ... it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail. (Nida, 1964, pp. 156–60, Weissbort & Eysteinnsson, 2006, p. 347).

Lambert offers a further aspect of communication, namely that remote partners may communicate much better than family members, as proximity in space ceased to be a necessary condition. Thus the principle of communication is reshaped (e.g. online visual communication is getting more and more important), as both verbal and written communication is heavily challenged by cutting edge technology. Belonging to a community is directly connected to the idea of being a rather active member of an online social group, directly leading to the weakening of the written canons: “The logo of a given company, its colours and favourite icons weaken the authority of written (printed) canons. All this leads to the awareness of the, maybe very ephemeral, goals of communities.” (Lambert, 2006a, p. 170).

In the preface to the second edition of Steiner’s *After Babel*, it is stated that “translation is formally and pragmatically implicit in every act of communication, in the emission and reception of each and every mode of meaning” and “To understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate.” (Steiner, 1998, p. xii). He goes even further stating that “human communication equals translation” and “a study of translation is a study of languages” (Steiner, 1998, p. 49), and in his view “*Language is the main instrument of man’s refusal to accept the world as it is.*” (Steiner, 1998, p. 228). Weissbort supports

Steiner's idea (2006, p. 614), explaining that all transactions between human beings resort to translation, thus human communication indeed can be related to translation, even "the act of writing may itself be regarded as one of translation."

Information theory also relies on translation, as in the classical scheme there is a linear arrangement of the source and the target at the two ends. The channel between the two ends serves for transmitting the information (code–decode–recode) towards the recipient, even interference (disturbing elements) may be observed. The act of recoding is in fact translation, thus we get to the starting point: to translate is to communicate (Weissbort & Eysteinson, 2006, p. 340). Decoding includes the analysis of the source language segments (word, phrase, sentence) with the help of a complex knowledge including grammar, semantics, syntax, idioms and culture and in the process of recoding (in the target language) this 'arsenal' is used again (cf. Wikipedia).

More and more studies prove that thorough target language knowledge is much more important than the knowledge of the source language, which explains why there is a tendency to translate into one's native language. There are notable translators whose endeavour resulted in famous translations even if they did not speak the source language, such as the Romanian George Coşbuc (1866–1918) translating from Sanskrit or the Hungarian Sándor Weöres (1913–1989) translating from Chinese.

At this point it is customary to offer an illustration with the above described (with arrows, feed-back, etc.), but we support Albert's view (Albert, 2011) that no picture, image, scheme or drawing is suitable for illustrating the process of translation, as the translators and their role are always marginalized this way.

As globalization has become fashionable, communication has turned international as well, along with politics and economics, and present day media constantly remind us of that, gaining the impression that the entire world are "next-door neighbours." (Lambert, 2006b, p. 64).

In our global world communication turned electronic soon, bringing a new notion in the scheme of communication, namely security. Naturally, the security in communication entails security in translation as well. As Biau Gil and Pym explain:

Translators quite often work on material that is not in the public domain, and this is indeed one of the reasons why relations of trust are so important. When sending and receiving files, you will have to learn various forms of zipping, secure FTP, or other company-specific forms of encoding, with all their corresponding passwords ... electronic communications make it relatively easy to distribute very large translation jobs between various intermediaries. (Biau Gil & Pym, 2006, p. 7)

Unless guarantee offered, clients do not even entrust translators with particular jobs, thus translators must be prepared for this new type of electronic communication. Here we can mention a rather compendious opinion: the days of paper, pencil and rubber are over (Gouadec, 2007, p. 109). Furthermore, the days of globalization are completed with the days of localization since the advent of webpages. More and more service providers recognized the importance of national languages, thus localization through translation entered – via technology – our lives. Practically everything is localized, starting from computer programs to product labels, although the quality of localized texts leaves much to be desired. In fact, it is

normal that high quality products are also localized with high quality assurance, whereas bulk, low-cost products pay less (attention) to localization.

## Conclusions

Seemingly we reached the last stage, which was hinted at in 2009 in a film entitled *Up in the Air*. The film explains a new word, the combination of *global* and *local*, resulting in *glocal*. We tend to believe that *glocalization* will take over, to which the first step was already taken. The development of information technology brought about changes on multiple levels: machine translation, computer-aided translation, yet – ironically – we are in danger of translating fewer and fewer English words into national languages (e.g. *computer*, *week-end*, *dealer*, *shop*, etc.). Some might even fear that national languages and cultures will disappear this way, being replaced by more global ones.

In this paper our initial aim was to highlight the common aspects of communication and language, but seemingly the (r)evolution of translation plays a vital role in defining communication. Ineffective communication is meaningless and in our struggle to make it effective ‘translation’ is involved on multiple levels, bearing in mind the possibility of both intralingual and interlingual translation.

As for interlingual translation, Rosenzweig stated more than three decades ago that there are no linguistic particularities in any language that cannot be found (at least in germs) in all the other languages (cf. Chomsky’s concept of universal grammar), which forms the basis of the possibility, mission and necessity of translation (Rosenzweig, 1980). However, he predicts the harmony of all languages one day, which – at least in the present – seems to be more than utopian. Some languages may play the role of unifiers in mediating culture, such as English today, which is the lingua franca of international communication in business, politics, administration, or science on the one hand, but we should mention popular culture and global advertisement as well (Crystal, 2003).

We believe that there is no reason to worry; as Lungu-Badea (2005) states, translation pervades our lives, it is omnipresent and indispensable in all fields of activity. As far as there is a financial interest in keeping languages alive, they will serve the main purpose, which is communication. And there is this financial interest, as even the European Union supports the idea of knowing at least two foreign languages, an idea which was not really popular decades ago.

We can only hope that newer and newer possibilities in life, among which job opportunities make people more aware of the importance of communication through translation and interpretation.

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