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# *Ten milestones on the translator's land: from private to public*

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In dealing with such a topic, the starting point may be the definition of language as "the most sensitive indicator of a relationship between an individual and a given social group […] It is also the arena where political and cultural allegiances and loyalties are fought out" (Kramsch 1998: 77).

The ability to speak the language allows individuals the possibility of using it to achieve a variety of communicative goals. Language is a part of culture best described as *the totality of beliefs and practices of a society*. Furthermore, culture is "a reality that is social, political, and ideological, and the difficulty of understanding cultural codes stems from the difficulty of viewing the world from another perspective, not of grasping another lexical or grammatical code" (Katan 2004: 30). Cultural values are present in the use of language. At the same time, everything connected with the cultural values makes up the specificity of a language, which raises a lot of questions and brings about a lot more difficulties in translation. One of the definitions that make the *purpose* of translation very clear is Hatim and Mason's (1997: 1) one: "an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication". Sager (1993: 211) stressed the *role* of translation "as a commissioned task which starts with a need for communication and ends with a finished product".

1. One side of the way from private to public, i.e. from the translating process and the translator's final choices to the result of the translating process, which is the public product, is related to the definition of the translation itself. A well-known definition of translation is that it is the attempt to render the meaning, feeling (overtones) and style of a piece of work written in one language as faithfully as possible into another language (normally one's own language). However, this holds valid in theory, since it can only be an ideal to touch, as most theorists consider. In practice compromise is inevitable, this making translation resemble politics in that both are arts of the possible.

2. We consider translation as a process of *negotiation* between author and readers, on the one hand, and between two languages and cultures, on the other. The greater the differences between the structure of the two languages and between the two cultures, the more difficult and complex the process of negotiation.

According to Eco (2003: 6), negotiation is "a process by virtue of which, in order to get something, each party renounces to something else, and at the end everybody feels satisfied since one cannot have everything". The negotiating process involves at least two parties: the source text (ST) with the cultural framework in which it was born and the target text (TT) with the cultural background in which it is expected to be read.

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The translator is the negotiator between the two parties and has to consider the function of the TT, i.e. the coordinate according to which the TT should work in a certain context. To put it differently, he guarantees that the reader can rely on the fact that what was said by the author is true.

Negotiation in translation is "always slanted towards the priviledged language, and […] does not take place on absolutely equal terms" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 4). This view is the result of a phenomenon called *international standardization* (Hermans and Lambert 1998: 117), whose leading exponent is the English language. The essential aspect of this international standardization is that the greatest influence on the selection of the texts to be translated is exerted by the culture and language with the greatest prestige and power.

3. In this process of negotiation, the translator has to make his/her choice: to accept or reject the target culture (TC) social norms and constraints. The discussion is now carried on in terms of the translator's *visibility* and in terms of translation strategies such as *domestication* and *foreignisation*. In case of *domestication*, the translator "moves the author towards the reader", whereas in case of foreignisation, the translator "moves the reader towards the author" (Venuti 1995: 19-20). Venuti considers that if the translator favours the foreignisation strategy, the target language readers (TLRs) will have an "alien reading experience" (ibid) because foreignisation does not imply absolute obedience to the TLC constraints and entails the translator's visibility. On the other hand, if the translator uses the domestication strategy that is the prevailing norm today, strangeness and foreignness of the source text (ST) will be minimized, i.e. the TT will not sound foreign to the target readers (TRs). The result is the translator's invisibility.

In Ulrych's (2000: 132) opinion the choice of translation strategies "is thus also to be seen in the light of how the target language and culture view 'the other'".

The result of negotiation in translation is local standardization, explicitation and naturalization, and the creativity of the target language text (TLT) is done in the interests of domestication, the translator disappearing behind the "voice" of the ST. However, the effect on the TC receivers is of utmost importance. As Eco says, "the impact a translation has upon its own cultural milieu is more important than an impossible equivalence with the original" (Eco 2003: 5). Moreover, the TRs are aware of the translator's presence (Hermans 1996: 27) and they are to accept the interpretation offered by the TT that is to function in the TC as an "original". In other words, the TT has to comply with the TC conventions being thus accepted in that culture.

The translator's most difficult task of mediating between the source language culture SLC and the target language culture TLC begins with his/her special private reading of the ST, through what happens in the so-called "black box" of his/ her mind, and ends with his/her making good final choices so that the public product of the translating process, i.e. the TT, may be considered a successful translation.

4. One of the most important aspects of the "public" dimension of the translation product refers to preserving the cultural identity of the SLT, on the one hand, and to its 'adequate correspondence' with the semantic fields specific to the target linguistic content and to the cultural context (CC), on the other. In this respect, attention is more turned from Nida's and Newmark's concept of *equivalence* to *approximation* and adequacy (Dollerup 2006: 53).

The translator' final choices will also be made according to the "stylistic matrix" of the target collective subconscious. The discourse created by the translator and



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read by the TC receivers will be based on the language semantic hierarchy (meaning, significance, designation) on the one hand, and on the translator's competence at each and every level, among which the idiomatic competence and the expressive competence (the latter being Chomsky's performance) are as necessary as difficult.

Furthermore, raising awareness of ambiguity and vagueness will render intelligible the linguistic choices expressed in the message. The translator will never ignore the lexical and textual rules that are decisive in making the difference between a good and an incorrect translation.

The idea is shared that the associations and thought processes '*solving*' problems in one language are generally the same in the other language. In *solving* translation problems, the translator may often choose between alternatives. Sometimes there may be several variants and the translator has to make the best choice. This is what makes literary translation essentially subjective, as compared to ESP translations that are essentially objective.

5. The *public* dimension of translation also lies in that, on the one hand, the translation of a literary work into English makes it known beyond its own linguistic boundaries, and, on the other hand, the translations in one country, no matter how underappreciated they may be, can interact socially and professionally with translators from another country, thinking at least that all of them are word-workers and at most that they make a very good job.

A major aspect of the public character of translation is that the literary translator aims at sharing the final product with the TL readers for whom the original work would be inaccessible. Therefore, literary translation is meant for publication. As a matter of fact, this is the first reward for the translator, i.e. translating for the prestige. On the other hand, for the literary translator there is the pleasure of puzzle – solving, whereas for the ESP translator there is usually a single choice to make, in an objective, exact and concise way, for a different kind of public, i.e. for the end-user to know if Moses had *horns* or *rays* on his forehead.

The author's collaboration with his/her translators, when possible, is also very important. In this respect Eco's argument is worth mentioning about his collaboration with his translators even in languages he did not know "for the simple reason that they were able to explain to me the kind of problem they were facing in their own language, asking for suggestions or permission to change some details of the original text" (Eco 2003: 2).

On the other hand, the public product of the translating process implies the existence of a client. As Dollerup says, "in the real world the sending side involves not only an individual author, but frequently also a client who also has some reasons for having a translation done" (Dollerup 2006: 57).

Nevertheless, the question may arise: What is the translator supposed to do with colloquialisms, proverbs, addressing words, references to popular culture, nicknames, slang, etc.? The generally shared answer is that a translator has to cut through these Gordian knots, but it is as important as useful to know *how* (s)he is supposed to do that.

Thus, there are some good public rewards of translation. That is to say the literary translator is now considered part of the literary world, his or her name being known by the TL readers. The ESP translator's reward is that the end-users enjoy the public product and are able to handle the apparatus, equipment, etc. they have bought.



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6. A very important facet of the private-public relationship may be the translation from a given SL into English (as the TL), which contradicts the general opinion that the translator has to be a native speaker of the TL. There are really very solid arguments that one should translate into one's mother tongue. However, there are enough examples of translators (Levitchi, Bantas, Cartianu, etc.) who have proved that literary translations from Romanian into English can be very successful. Whatever the direction of translation may be, the essential condition for a successful public product is that the translator should possess a working knowledge of a language pair – a solid grounding in the SL and fluent TL. Furthermore, the TL fluency has a paramount role in literary translations, especially in translating poetry. With this type of translation a thoroughgoing command of the TL is by far the more important of the two.

Although the specifics of translating from a given SL into English differ from one SL to another, there are recurrent challenges and aspects of translation, whatever the language pair may be. A relevant example is that when there is not a one – to-one relation between a particular word or phrase in the SLT and in the TLT, or when there is no corresponding equivalent in the TL, one of the translator's major mistakes is to try and squeeze every last kernel of meaning from the SLT. This is usually the result of a zealous concern for 'fidelity' to the original, but more often than not, the effect is to produce an odd-sounding TL version that is far from the author's intent.

When the translation product seems less readable to the TL readers, it is an indication of its fidelity to the SLC.

It is the thought-by-thought translation that is preferred to the word-by-word one. Thought-by-thought translations are usually the more fluent ones. The goal is not to translate what the SL author wrote, but what (s)he *meant* so as not to distort the TL reader's perception of the author.

On the other hand, the TL readers are not tolerant of idiosyncrasies in the author's style. They may not understand deviations from 'normal' usage which they will consider to be poor work done by the translator when in reality it is an artifact of the structure of the SL culture.

7. The fact is well known that register is very important in translation. Moreover, the translation unit is not only the word, the sentence, or paragraph, but the author's entire *idiolect*. A special difficulty in translation is idiolectal usage, "that is an idiosyncratic even bizarre personal sense given to a term by a particular writer" (Newmark 1991: 153, 2003).

A very useful tool for a translator is the perception of the *tone* which is the overall feeling conveyed by an utterance, a passage, or an entire work, including both conscious and unconscious resonance. It also provides an important clue to register. Tone is more than style. A writer may vary in tone, without changing style, the text between the changes in tone being called *tone-unit*. By perceiving and using the right tone, the translator avoids literal meanings that distort the author's intent. Tone implies humour, irony, or any other feeling. There is *tone violation* when the translator does not render the requirements of tone. As a matter of fact, the rendition of such requirements is an ideal to touch. We share Dollerup's opinion that "we all speak our idiolects, subsumed to our sociolects, and perhaps even dialects. We cannot know let alone be familiar with, all 'styles' and 'tones' in our societies" (Dollerup 2006: 57).



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8. In rendering culture specific elements the first condition to be fulfilled is the translator's *cultural familiarity,* i.e. the translator needs experience and extensive exposure to the TC in order to translate these elements accurately. However, the question may arise: Can a translator really be familiar with the target culture? We should give a negative answer to such a question. We agree with Dollerup (2006: 57) that "None of us knows all the social cultures and subcultures of our country", because translators "are not perfect […] although they should have good background knowledge".

In our opinion, the truly bicultural individual is still an ideal hard to touch. There are culture specific elements which are often meaningless to the TL reader. The question arises: What should the translator do? There are situations when the best solution with such opaque items in the SC is not to translate them at all, but this does not mean omitting them. This refers to the self-defining capacity of words in context.

Generally the translator is supposed to divide such items into three categories: a) those which must be explained, b) those that should not be explained and c) those providing their own explanation through context.

9. In considering SL and TL-oriented translations we share Eco's opinion that translation is rightfully target-oriented. On the other hand, "a source-oriented translation must do everything possible to make the B language reader understand what the author has thought or said in language A. If Homer seems to repeat 'rose – fingered dawn' too frequently, the translator must not try to vary the epithet just because today's manuals of style insist [otherwise]. The reader has to understand that in those days dawn had rosy fingers whenever it was mentioned, just as these days Washington always has DC" (Eco 2003: 4).

Therefore, we agree with the targeteers because a TL-oriented translation renders the specifics of the SL by the specifics of the TL, the result being an increased readability of the final public product by the TL readers, everything depending on the translator's linguistic and cultural competence.

10. It is generally accepted that after 30 years a translation loses half of its vitality and capacity of being very well understood by the public, i.e. by the TL readers. In other words, a literary work must be retranslated every 30 years so that the translation can preserve its function as a bridge between cultures and epochs. Thus, the translator has to consider the historical, social and cultural background of the ST, but at the same time to find solutions for the TT to seem readable and accessible to his/her contemporary TLC readers.

To cut a long story short, we share Eco's (2003:6) opinion that the translator's land is somewhere between what the author believed to be his intentions and the fact that the ST (independently of the author's early intentions) can elicit unexpected interpretations being in some way improved when it is re-embodied in another language (Eco 2003:6).



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