# ENGLISH - A BRIDGE LANGUAGE (?)

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*Abstract*

In the last decades, people have been becoming increasingly aware of the fact that knowledge of an, at least, foreign language than the mother tongue is, indeed, an imperative. One should by no means understand that we intend here to make lobby for one language or the other! It is a mere admittance of the importance and need of learning foreign languages in a linguistically globalised society.

**Keywords: foreign languages, bridge language, communication, English, 'mixture' languages**

Motto: What's in a language…
by any other name it sounds like…English….[2]

In the last decades, people have been becoming increasingly aware of the fact that knowledge of an, at least, foreign language than the mother tongue is, indeed, an imperative. When it comes to choosing which languages to study, things become a little complicated, due to a number of concurrent factors: when we are at a very young age, we learn the language(s) used in our families, or the one(s) taught in our kindergarten, schools, etc., therefore, it is the language that kind of 'chooses' us. It is only when we grow older that we become aware of what a foreign language is all about, what it means, its use and implications. But, how do we decide what language to choose? In Romania, or other such Eastern European countries, there is this tendency of choosing to study English, since, for a while now, it has been the international language, seemingly understood and more or les correctly used by the majority of the people. Or, due to the economic and social power it still represents, the German language would appear to be another strong choice. The French language is not forgotten, either, nor is Spanish or Italian, due to the increasingly large number of Easter Europeans working in Spain, or Italy.

One should by no means understand that we intend here to make lobby for one language or the other! It is a mere admittance of the importance and need of learning foreign languages in a linguistically globalised society. Not to mention the fact that learning foreign languages was agreed to be among the brain activities able to fight against horrible mental diseases. According to an online article[3] Staying mentally active: "There is some evidence suggesting that rates of dementia are lower in people who remain as mentally, physically, and socially active as possible throughout their lives, and also among those who enjoy a wide range of different activities and hobbies. Some activities that may reduce the risk of developing dementia include: reading, writing for pleasure, learning

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[2] *pun* after Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* 1600:
JULIET: "What's in a name? that which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet;"
[3] http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Alzheimers-disease/Pages/Prevention.aspx



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foreign languages, playing musical instruments, taking part in adult education courses, etc. (…)".

But what happens when the 'wanna-be' speakers of a language do not get the chance (for an infinite number of reasons) to thoroughly master the new language? What if their purpose does not require a mastership of the language but a rather superficial approach would suffice? needless to say that men of letters, philologists, linguists might disregard this idea as being abnormal, yet, such a phenomenon does exist. Less experienced new users of a certain language might actually literally re-create the language they 'need': this seems to be the case of the already well-known *Spanglish* (that mixture between Spanish and English). Therefore, *Spanglish* refers to that blend between two languages, "to the speech of people who speak parts of two languages, or whose normal language is different from that of the country where they live. The term *Spanglish* was first brought into literature by the Puerto Rican Salvator Tio; despite its widespread use among the Hispanic population, *Spanglish* is not an actual language"[4], (…) but a language "based on a simplified syntax and grammar that acts as an intermediary between people who don't have a common language".

Between 1902 and 1948, the main language of instruction in public schools (used for all subjects except Spanish language courses) was English. Consequently, many American English words are now found in the Puerto Rican vocabulary. Spanglish may also be known by a regional name. Spanglish does not have one unified dialect and therefore lacks uniformity; Spanglish spoken in New York, Miami, Texas, and California can be different. Although not always uniform, Spanglish is actually so popular in many Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, especially in the Miami Hispanic community, that some knowledge of Spanglish is required to understand those in the area (Ardila 2005: 61). Many Puerto Ricans living on the island of St. Croix speak in informal situations a unique Spanglish-like combination of Puerto Rican Spanish and the local Crucian dialect, which is naturally very different from the Spanglish spoken elsewhere. The same assumption goes for the large Puerto Rican population in the state of New York and Boston.

Spanglish is not a pidgin language. It is totally informal; there are no set hard-and-fast rules. From a linguistic point of view, Spanglish can be labeled many things. It can actually be a pidgin, because many of the English borrowings are due to the desire to have a common meaning for various words among all native Spanish speakers that may have varying definitions of the same word. Spanglish can be considered a Creole or dialect of Spanish as well, as it has become the native language of some second-generation Hispanic children who are often exposed to Spanglish at home and when using this dialect, mostly understood by monolingual Spanish speakers. Spanglish may also be considered a Spanish-English interlanguage as it represents the linguistic border between Mexico and the United States (Ardila 2005:66)."

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanglish



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There are two phenomena of Spanglish, borrowing and code-switching. English borrowed words will usually be adapted to Spanish phonology. Code-Switching and Code-Mixing on the other hand is commonly used by bilinguals. Code-switching means that a person will begin a sentence in one language and at a certain point this one will begin speaking in another language (Ardila 2005:70). This switch will occur at the beginning of a sentence or a new topic. In code-mixture this change in language will occur at any given time with no regard to the beginning of a sentence or topic. Code-switching normally happens when someone is speaking Spanish as opposed to English, because it is supposed that native Spanish speakers understand more English than native English speakers do Spanish; therefore, this code-switching that results in Spanglish seems acceptable to native Spanish speakers (Ardila 2005:71).

There are two types of code-switching: intersentential and intrasentential. The first refers to code-switching between sentences and the second refers to code-switching within sentences. Intersentential code-switching normally happens when speaking and intrasentential when writing. Many researchers believe that intrasentential code-switching is more elaborate and involves a bilingual individual who is proficient in both languages, as switching within sentences requires a high level of efficiency to avoid violating grammatical rules of either language (Montes-Alcalá 2000:219).[5]

Since any reading attempt seems to appear as a translation, a process of decoding the meanings and significations of the message in accordance with one's understanding and sensitivity[6], we consider that teaching English as a language used to enhance translation is an imperative action.

In his famous book on translations, George Steiner[7] admits that "language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is" underlining people permanent quest for knowledge. But, in order to get to know the world, one has to "use" the language of different cultures in order to communicate, thus one needs the ability to translate.

In the light of the social reality today, English has won the status of the language which today has become the bridge between cultures, therefore translating in and from English into any mother tongue has become a necessity. It fulfills the feeling of belonging to a larger linguistic community. Out of an internal necessity, which has become an autonomous practice, translation has begun to self-define, to self-set, to self-communicate, to be taught.[8]

This might be considered the ambition of the human who is no longer satisfied with isolation, who wishes to go out there and know, by all means necessary, even reading in translation, the world and the culture of the Other. Positive aspects regardin globalisation: interaction between and among countries, opening of new posiibilities in the development of human civilization, intensification of changes of all kind, inter-human

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanglish
[6] After Darie Novaceanu, in *Frumoasele Infidele*, from Romania Literara, XIII, nr 23, 1980, p. 4
[7] *After Babel, Aspects of Language and Translation*, Oxford University Press, 1975
[8] after Dan Culcer, in *O Teorie a Traducerii*, from Vatra, XV, nr. 5, 1985, p. 8



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contacts, becoming familiar to other cultures etc.[9] Negative aspects regardin globalisation: reaction of defence in the light of national identity endangered. The linguistic issue: always an issue: no matter if or how much world might evolve, people will never use one and the same language. We do not believe that those behind the idea of establishing an international language expect the entire globe to express into one single language nor do we believe that any language has anything to gain if kept and preserved as it is, not 'touched' by translation. Yet, one should understand the need of establishing one (or a few…) language of world communication as a compromise solution, as a mediator. As it appears, now English seems to be that language, since it is being used in all its forms and registers: written, spoken, formal, informal, in all domains: economic, juridical, technical etc.

It has become lingua franca and continues to gain field; it has become the language of the international communication, the language of business, politics, administration, science and academics, of publicity and popular culture, acc. to David Crystal.[10] We need to admit that out of the avid desire to know everything about everything, we have become the slaves of the sovereignty of one single language, being assured that that is the only way we have access to the world values we long to know.

We do not seem to be bothered anymore by reading a book in its translated variant and we do not consider this to be a weakness of the human kind. We consider this phenomenon to be an acceptable one as long as it offers us an accessible database. The changes that might appear in the vocabulary due to globalization: terms like: business, dealer, computer, happy end, marketing, management, manager, printer, know-how, target, item, trend etc – are being used today without translation. All the translation processes lead to many debates, therefore to many controversies>> all in all, each factor implied have nothing but to gain out of this process. Translation is to be perceived as a means of enrichment in all directions: enrichment of vocabulary, of experiences, of knowledge, of cultures

As we have already stated previously, the process of translation activates national and international cultural identities. Each and every language possesses specific linguistic and cultural particularity, unique, impossible or very difficult to render in a different language, resulting in endless difficulties in translation. We agree, therefore, that any language contains particular terms, terms that carry information of national cultural identity, terms that cannot be entirely equated by means of translation.

When referring to the translation of literature, it is really difficult to offer a 1:1 equivalence between the source and target texts. If not completely impossible, as, for instance, the romantic and post-romantic translators (and not only) used to believe. Nevertheless, in order to achieve that universal cultural network, in the name of obtaining that ideal system of inter-cultural relation, and, because it just couldn't be any other way,

[9] conform http://facultate.regielive.ro/proiecte/comunicare/cultura_contemporana_intre_globalizare_si_identitate_culturala-63881.html

[10] D. Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1987, p. 358.



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not only that literary translations are accepted but even encouraged, of course with particular care for the form alongside with the fond. It is one thing to accept that a translation is not entirely faithful to its original, yet it is a plus in value, since it introduces to the target language, target culture an entirely new and different value, unknown up to that moment, and it is a completely different thing (unconceivable, we must underline) to allow any mediocre translation to attempt to accede the same statute. Therefore, if we cannot completely apply the rule "no losses, no gains" in translation, at least to make sure we operate a cautious and careful selection to any translation act.

Nevertheless, since we agreed upon the necessity of translation, these terms need to be rendered and adapted to the target language. They are the so-called 'culture specific elements' (CSEs) that are considered to be "statements carrying cultural information, cultural units, 'culturally marked items' (Badea 2004:27), 'prestigious hints' (idem), next to cultisms, yet without identifying themselves with them, nor to the etymological doublets, or to the neologisms".

G. L Badea understands by CSE "that minimal unit carrying cultural information, unit that does not decompose in order to decode the meaning and perform the translation, since that kind of an operation would tamper with the correct understanding of the meaning by the receiver (be it reader, translator etc) and would, therefore, lead to the alteration of the authorial intent." Let us not loos sight of the definition offered by the DEX (Romanian Academy: Explicative Romanian Language Dictionary) "Culturem (CSE: Culture Specific Element) n. = the smallest unit of a cultural phenomenon, common element to certain cultural forms, structures, types. (...)"

It was highly necessary to clarify such a term, since a John Locke observed the linguistic and cultural barriers that impose that transfer resistance, that inertia in the translation process (Vilceanu 2007: 119) while Wilhelm von Humboldt considered that languages were a "fascinating combination of universal linguistic and cultural elements with specific linguistic and cultural elements (...) that genius/spirit of the language of a people that cannot be transferred in a different language without suffering alterations in the process." (idem)

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