THE SIMPLICITY OF THE COMPLEXITY
ON THE TRANSLATION OF SPECIALISED TEXTS

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Abstract

By means of translation we are able to enter new and different linguistic worlds, worlds that are 'inhabited' by various people with various preoccupations. Things may appear to be clear and simple, while, in fact they are clear but complex. We, as translators, all have an idea on how 'diversity' in language is dealt with by translation; we are aware of the fact that certain care ought to be taken when dealing with the source text, its addressee and the target text. No matter what type of texts we may be facing, there are a number of operations imposed. When it comes to the translation of specialised types of texts, the issues involved regard terminology used, understanding the original and rendering the material into the target language.

Keywords: translation, specialised texts, linguistic diversity, linguistic conventions

Specialists in the field of Translation Studies state that translation is a means of mass communication, that what makes the connection between people. In order to be clear and understood by all the participants to the speech act, it needs to be kept clear-cut simple.

"Translation is the mediation between plurality of the cultures and unity of humanity." It is the "reply offered to the irrecoverable phenomenon of human plurality with its dispersal and confusion aspects, summed by the Babel myth. "We find ourselves after Babel (…). Translation stands as a paradigm for all the alterations, not only from one language to the other language, but from one culture to the other culture. It smoothens the opening to concrete universals and not to abstract, un-rooted from history ones." [2]

The specialised literature has been dealing with issues regarding the degree of difficulty implied by the translation of literary vs. non-literary types of texts. There are voices that say that literary translation is much more difficult to render in translation than a non-literary type of text.

We believe that "things are becoming complicated when we have to approach the artistic zone, where the shades and valences characteristic to a certain language are most of the times difficult to render by means of translation. More than that, a literary translation handles the transfer of literary forms, prose, poetry, which

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[2] Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la Traduction*, Bayard, 2004, translation and introductory study by Magda Jeanrenaud, *Despre traducere*, Polirom Pulishing House, Iaşi, 2005, p. 130

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increase the difficulty, perceived, nevertheless as constructive challenge, just like in a chess game.[3]

On the other hand, though, there is this idea according to which the non-literary type of texts, i.e. the specialised ones may generate difficulties in translation due to the fact that the translator needs to have knowledge in different domains that are 'outside' the range of literature; we are dealing here with areas covered by technical/juridical/medical/science terminology.

It has been argued that "a study of translation is a study of the language".[4] Therefore, by means of translation we are able to enter new and different linguistic worlds, worlds that are 'inhabited' by various people with various preoccupations. Things may appear to be clear and simple, while, in fact they are clear but complex. We, as translators, all have an idea on how 'diversity' in language is dealt with by translation; we are aware of the fact that certain care ought to be taken when dealing with the source text, its addressee and the target text.

No matter what type of texts we may be facing, there are a number of operations imposed. When it comes to the translation of specialised types of texts, the issues involved regard terminology used, understanding the original and rendering the material into the target language.

We ought to mind that there are certain features to the specialised texts, features that have an impact on how such texts are to be translated. Therefore, specialised writing is the production of non-literary, pragmatic texts designed for use in a specific field or discipline, such as science, technology, healthcare, business, administration, or tourism. Such texts usually contain terminology and concepts particular to the field and often follows conventional formats. The purpose of the specialised text is primarily informative and the translator's concern is for clarity, precision and effectiveness in the transmission of information. These types of texts follow different conventions both in source and target languages. They use specialised concepts and writing conventions of different fields of knowledge. They ought to be clear and leave no room for interpretation.

There appear to be at least four important factors a translator ought to consider when performing a translation of a specialised text: first, what is the purpose of the text involved: the specialized text is often a vehicle of research, instruction, clarification, or dissemination of information. The translator needs to figure out whether the text is purely informative, or if it has other purposes as well, such as to attract the reader's attention or to promote something. Secondly, it is the target audience that also needs to be established. Therefore, the translator must determine who the reader is and how the reader will use the text. On the other hand, it is important for the translator to make the text reader oriented, i.e. establish if the text in question is designed for a specialized or

[3] Bianca-Oana Han, *On Translation : communication, controversy, cultural globalisation*, Colecția Studii, Editura Universității „Petru Maior" din Târgu-Mureș, 2011, p. 51

[4] Acc. to George Steiner., *After Babel*, Oxford University Press, New York and London, 1975, translated by Valentin Negoiță and Ștefan Avădanei, *După Babel. Aspecte ale limbii şi traducerii*, 1983, Univers Pulishing House, Buharest, p. 75.

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non-specialized readership. Thirdly, the translator of the specialized text should have a general knowledge of the field he translates from and be able to understand the concepts and vocabulary used in both the source and target languages, therefore knowledge of subject matter is highly needed. Last, but not least, the conventions implied by the specialised field are also to be clear to the translator. In specialised writing, conventional formats are commonly followed. It is important for the translator to consult similar texts for examples of layouts and the use of terminology.

It is also true that text structure in specialized writing is particularly important, since the pattern is generally more rigid and the cues to the pattern more explicit than in non-specialized writing. They say that there is a difference between how we cope with a literary and then with a non-literary, i.e. specialised type of text. Peter Newmark[5] argues that "the main intentional difference between literature and non-literature is that the first comprises the world of the mind and the imagination; the second, the world of reality, of facts and events. From the point of view of denotation, literature is (a) poetry, which covers lyrical, dramatic and epic poetry; (b) fiction, which covers short stories and novels; and (c) drama, which covers (1) tragedy, plays about life and death, (2) comedy, plays about normal life, and (3) farce, plays that exaggerate the broad humour of life. Literature derives from the realm of word dictionaries, the general lower case words; non-literature covers the topics of encyclopaedias, encyclopaedic dictionaries, names, titles, upper case words. Literature is written both to be spoken and `sonorised', i.e. read out to oneself and consciously heard in the ear, in natural speech-rhythms, with a word-order that only deviates in order to foreground (emphasise) or `background' (understate) a segment of a text. Non-rhetorical, non-literary texts are written to be soundlessly skimmed."

One can generally talk about the art of literary translation and the science of non-literary translation, but in fact, translation can never be an exact science, since any two languages are always unequally and differently endowed, though not to the same degree.

"In literary texts, the words are as important as the content; in non-literary texts, this is only true of key words that represent significant concepts, as well as objects, actions and physical and moral qualities, for all of which true synonyms do not exist. (Say: shrub, stutter, green, decent - unfortunately translation equivalents for the adjectives are often missing, since most of these adjectives, including 'green' - but not 'black' or 'white' - and 'decent') require a degree of partly subjective evaluation."[6]

Between literary and non-literary texts, there is a middle stream of topics, headed by the essay, the prime example of a genre with a non-literary subject and a literary form, which is perhaps followed by autobiography, arts criticism, philosophy, religion, history, psychology, sociology, cultural studies - whether the words are as important as the content or how closely they should be translated will depend on how well written and how serious they are. All these medial topics are only discussed in non-literary language -

[5] Peter Newmark, *Non-literary in the Light of Literary Translation,* http://www.jostrans.org/issue01/art_newmark.php
[6] idem

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words such as 'descry', 'ponder', meditate' would not normally be found in such texts, unless as quotations from literary texts" considers Newmark.

Literary texts are about persons, implicitly dialogues between first and second person singular, with a first person plural commentator or chorus; non-literary texts are about objects, basically in the third person. Literary words are about allegorical therefore moral truth. Non-literary texts are about objects, basically in the third person. They are written to be read soundlessly or skimmed or gisted. The core of literary texts is the original or imaginative metaphor and the neologism; the core of non-literary texts is the standard or explanatory metaphor and the plain word. Literary texts are written to be read aloud in the mind, to be slowly savoured, to be judiciously read repeatedly, and increasingly appreciated; the sound of non-literary texts is often ignored, and they are read quickly.

Literary and non-literary translations are two different professions, though one person may sometimes practise them both. They are complementary to each other and are noble, each seeking in the source text a valuable but different truth, the first allegorical and aesthetic, the second factual and traditionally functional. They sometimes each have different cultural backgrounds, occasionally referred to as 'the two cultures', which are detrimentally opposed to each other.

In our attempt to help 'solve' this overly debated upon issue regarding translation and its ways of managing original texts into target texts, we bring into the foreground Newmark's ideas according to which translators should sense that there should be a difference between translation methods and translation procedures. He writes that, "while translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language". He goes on to refer to the following methods of translation:[7]

Word-for-word translation: in which the SL word order is preserved and the words translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context. Literal translation: in which the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context. Faithful translation: it attempts to produce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures. Semantic translation: which differs from 'faithful translation' only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text. Adaptation: which is the freest form of translation, and is used mainly for plays (comedies) and poetry; the themes, characters, plots are usually preserved, the SL culture is converted to the TL culture and the text is rewritten. Free translation: it produces the TL text without the style, form, or content of the original. Idiomatic translation: it reproduces the 'message' of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original. Communicative translation: it attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the

[7] *Approaches to translation*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981, in Rodica Dimitriu, *Theories and practices of translation*, Colecția Cursus, Institutul European Iaşi, 2002, p. 22

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original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.

All these may apply to translation of literary and of non-literary texts. It is of paramount importance for that translator and reader, for the same matter, to acknowledge that every textual instance is absolutely unique; it is in the same time simple in its complexity (generated by semantic, stylistic, linguistic, lexical, professional, social, historical etc. aspects) and complex in its simplicity.

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